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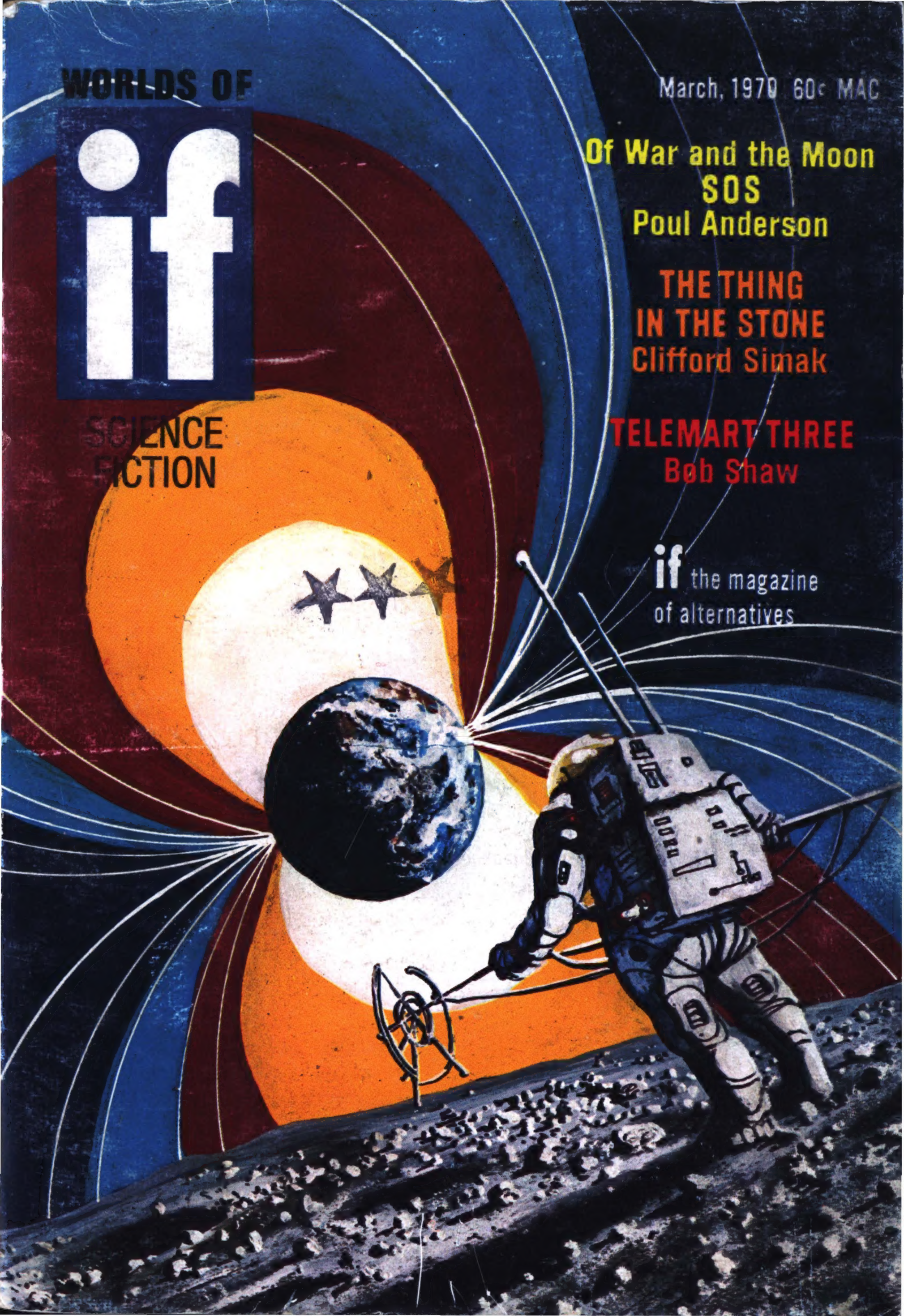
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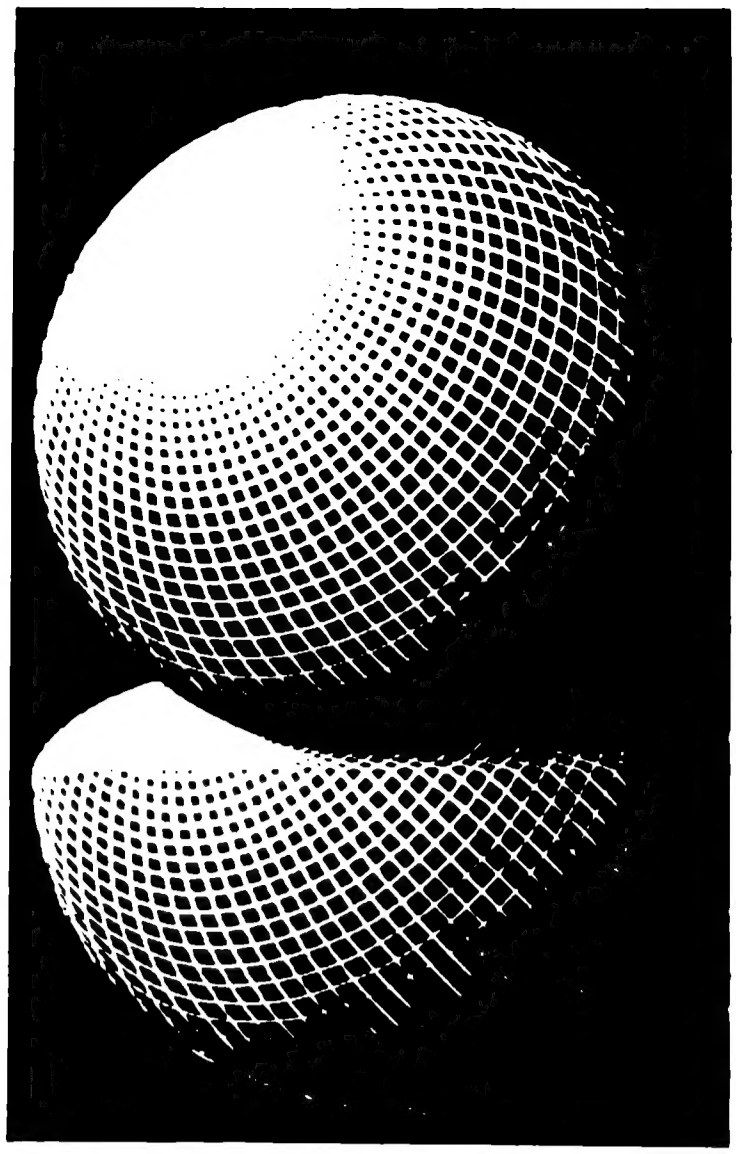
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March, 1970
Vol. 20, No. 3
Issue 146

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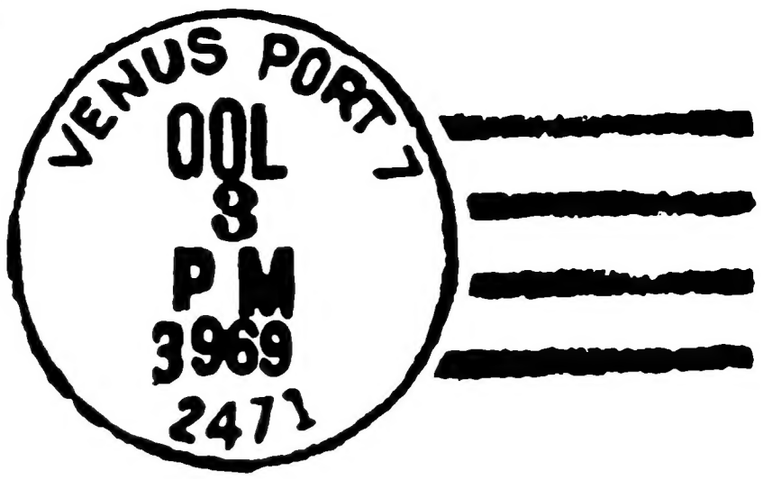
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Cover by Mike Gilbert, suggested by SOS

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# HUE and CRY




***Readers write—and wrong!***

THIS MONTH'S nomination for the most gratifying piece of mail goes to the following:

*Dear Sir:*

*For the editorial in your issue of November, 1969* (Galaxy), *three cheers.*

*With my respects,*

*Very truly yours,*
*Stanley Katz*
*Professor*
*School of Engineering and Architecture*
*City College, N.Y.*

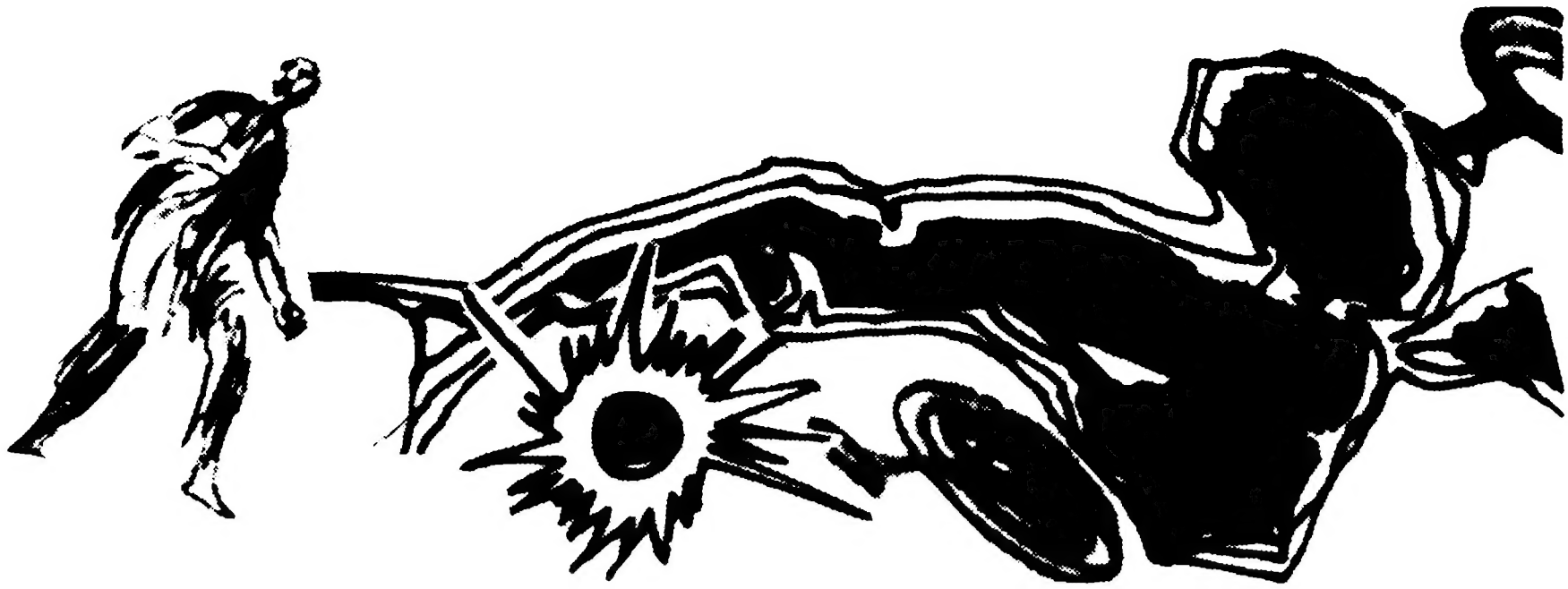
The response to the November *Galaxy* and December *If* editorials (*Brain Pollution* and *Skintelligence*, respectively and dealing with the undemonstrated correlation between skin color and intelligence) has been beautiful, pro and con, and suggests that people as a species might yet make it.

Among the most edifying is the next:

*Dear Mr. Jakobsson:*

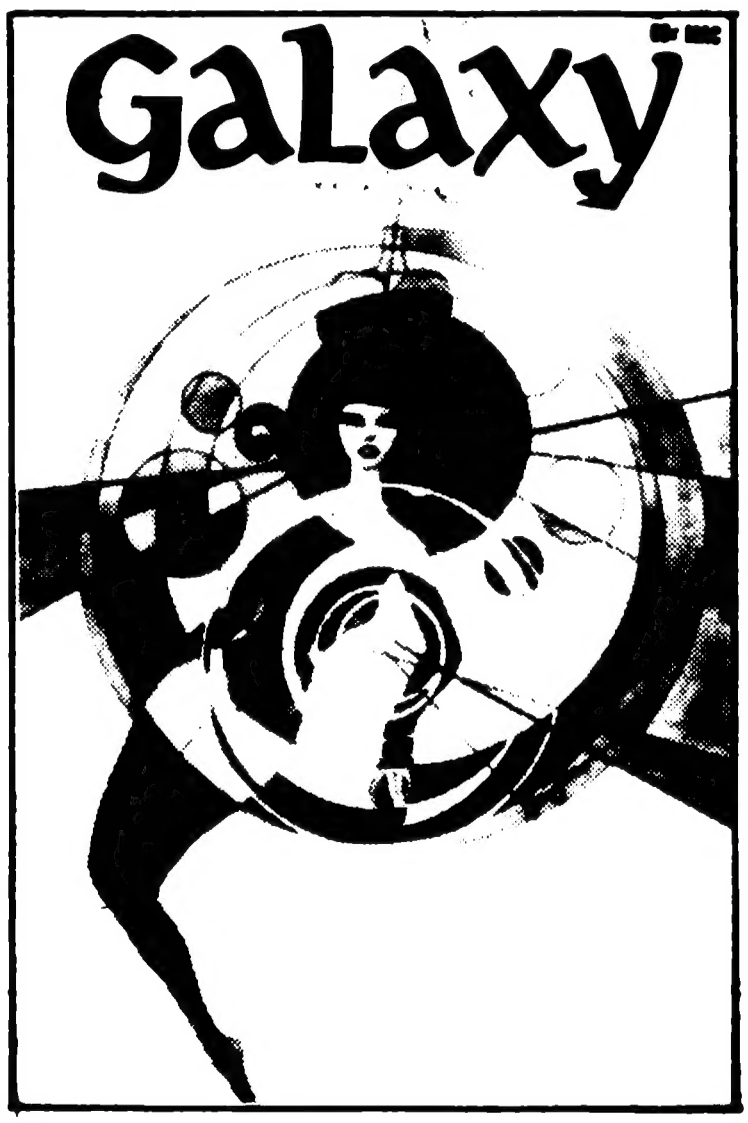
*It is interesting to note how Campbell absolutely refuses to accept statistical evidence connecting smoking with cancer and heart disease, and yet uses it without qualms in the area of IQ which is a very ill-defined concept at best. The definition of IQ as that which IQ tests measure is about as useful as any, although in college Prof. Russel Ackoff (then Director of Operations Research at Case) defined it as the second partial derivative of knowledge with respect to changes in environment and time. That sounds impressive, but just try to use it. I suspect that if you compared the average IQ's of any two groups, you would find a difference; and probably could decide in advance which group you wanted to score best badly biased. Individual variations within each group would be far greater than the difference between the groups. Actually, variations within a single person can be quite large. All of us have fields of knowledge which we absorb very readily, and others which we can't get into our thick heads no matter how hard we try. Since IQ is supposed to be a measure of how easily we learn, a test can be very easily biased. I, personally, have been tested with*

*(Please turn to page 155)*



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BOB SHAW

# TELEMART 3

*She was unfaithful unto death—but not her own!*

FOUR days after the honeymoon Ted Trymble came home from golf and found his wife had been unfaithful to him. The evidence was there—right outside his front door—for all the world to see.

"Why did you do it, Maggie?" he demanded, setting his clubs down in a corner with exaggerated care.

He kept his face immobile and his voice crisp, pretending to be not unduly shocked, though inwardly he was praying to hear it was all a mistake.

But Maggie smiled her calm, careless smile and shrugged.

"It was just an impulse," she said. "An irresistible impulse."

Ted went to the window and eyed the evidence. The black Turbo-Cadillac was almost as long as the house and its haunches gleamed in the late afternoon sun like those of a panther about to spring. So she was admitting it, just like that.

"Maggie," he said reasonably. "Everybody gets that kind of impulse now and then. One simply has to learn to control it."

"I can't," she replied blandly. "When I find something I like—I buy it."

"I see."

Ted strode into the kitchen, took a beer bulb from the refrigerator and squirted some of the frothy liquid into his mouth. He sat down in the cool seclusion of the dining alcove to consider the matter of his wife's dereliction. Maggie's parents had left her an estate of some quarter of a million —Ted knew the sum to a penny but preferred to think in round numbers—the income from which was just enough to maintain Ted and her in modest comfort for the rest of their lives. When they became engaged the agreement was that the capital would be kept intact. Ted was a personable young man and knew he could probably have married real money but he had exchanged his boyish hopes of some day owning a private airplane and yacht for the certitude of never having to work. And he had been prepared to stick to the bargain because marriage was, in his opinion, still a sacred covenant.

The trouble was that Maggie appeared not to share his high sense of principle. She had just blown a noticeable fraction of their livelihood in one afternoon. A pang of anguish caused Ted's fingers to clamp inward on the plastic bulb and a wavering stream of beer leaped across the kitchen. He composed himself with an effort and went back into the lounge.

"I forgive you this time, Maggie," he said stiffly. "I guess it won't do any harm for me to be seen in a better car but you must promise not to betray our wedding vows again."

"Of course, honey."

Maggie spoke with a lack of effort Ted found disturbing and she went on flicking the glowing pages of a tri-di magazine.

Two days later he came home from a morning's workout in the gymnasium to find that his fears had been well founded. Maggie was sporting a bracelet of genuine green-veined Venusian gold costing roughly ten times as much as its counterpart in Earth gold would have.

"I promised not to buy another car," was her defense. "This isn't another car, is it? It doesn't look much like a car to me."

She flirted her wrist in his face and the bracelet's chunky links clicked like the action of a well-oiled rifle.

"It isn't a car," Ted agreed, "but it's something we can afford even less. What about our investments?"

"This is an investment. Isn't gold an investment?"

"Not that kind. Don't you ever read the financial pages? Don't you know that big nuclear powered ships have just been proved out on the Venus and Mars hauls? The cost of Venusian gold at the moment is ninety per cent freight charge but by this time next year it'll be as common as dirt."

Maggie sniffed disbelievingly.

"Well, I was bored sitting here by myself. Other girls' husbands stay at home with them."

"Bored?" Ted was aghast. "You absolutely seem to forget that when those other guys are swanning round the house watching television and getting fat—I'm working hard to build up health. That's a marriage partner's most important duty—to keep himself healthy."

"Oh, Jesus," Maggie whispered. "What have I done?"

Three days later, while Ted was surfing, she bought a luminous mink costing as much as the car and the bracelet put together. Ted examined the price tag, then went into the kitchen, took a beer bulb in each hand and expended them in a foaming orgasm of fury. When calmness returned he went back to the lounge and greeted his wife with a numb smile.

"It has just occurred to me that I've been neglecting you a little, Maggie. Let's go out tonight and see what we can do about hitting the town."

Maggie's eyes flickered with enthusiasm. She hurried away to engage in lengthy cosmetic rituals and that night she really did hit the town. When she was too full of assorted liquors to be aware of what was happening, Ted pushed her out through the window of their third-floor bedroom.

THE fall did not kill Maggie but the damage to her lower spine was such that she was confined to a wheelchair for life. As the Trymbles' house was tall and

narrow—with a steep flight of steps at the door—Ted felt that his wife was as good as dead. She could not, at any rate, get to the expensive stores, where she would be tempted to further acts of infidelity.

With a minimum of prompting from him she sold the car and the coat at a relatively small loss but insisted on retaining the bracelet of green-veined Venusian gold.

"What's the point of keeping it?" he pleaded. "I mean, you don't even go out now."

"It's company for me. Something I can look at."

"But there must be more interesting things to look at—how about a television set?"

To Ted's surprise, his wife showed interest in the suggestion.

"If I sell the bracelet will you get me a set?"

"Of course, sweetie."

"Any kind of a television set?"

He sensed the trap immediately but in his mind's eye he could see the big nuclear-powered ships speeding toward Earth with cargoes of cheaper Venusian gold and he decided play along.

"Any kind of set you want, Maggie. You know how bad I feel about you being tied to that chair all the time."

"That's nice of you, honey. I'd like a Telemart Three."

Ted swallowed unhappily. He detested television as an opiate which sapped a man's strength of body and mind—he even had an aversion to reading about technical developments in the field. But he knew about the Telemart Three.

The set was ordered that day and Ted's unhappiness increased as he watched the technicians position the eight-foot proscenium and arch at one end of the lounge. Working with blunt efficiency they ripped out the floor below the proscenium and ran a mass of cables, conduits and wave guides down to the raw materials tank they were installing in the basement. Four hours later the job was completed and a Telemart sales exec formally presented Maggie with a white-and-gold brochure. He then placed the remote control set in her hand with the air of an English archbishop conferring the orb and sceptre of his sovereign.

"This is your on-off switch and channel selector," he said, addressing himself intensely to Maggie and ignoring Ted. He moved the switch and a pretty girl in a silver dress appeared on the proscenium, singing in the low voice of a French *diseuse*. The only way in which she could be distinguished from real flesh-and-blood was a slight tendency to glow, which made her brighter than the other people in the room.

"Oops," the sales exec said. "If the image is too bright you do this." He moved a knob and the girl dimmed to normalcy.

"It's wonderful," Maggie

breathed. "When do we get the commercials?"

"You shouldn't have long to wait," the exec said benignly, his eyes gleaming behind old-fashioned hornrims. A few seconds later the silver girl finished her song and vanished, to be replaced by a handsome, tanned man in beachwear. He reclined on a sun chair on a shockingly real area of honey-colored sand and in his hand was a dewy-cold bottle of Tingle-lime. Ted started involuntarily—he could actually smell sea air mingled with the keen tang of the soft drink. He examined the small orifices in the edge of the proscenium, looking for visible signs of gas being emitted.

He saw nothing.

" . . . . why don't you join me?" the image was saying. "Join me now."

"Shall I?" Maggie asked excitedly.

"Only if you can use some Tingle-lime." the exec replied. "We urge all our clients to buy only what they really need."

"We drink lots of Tingle-lime."

"No, we don't Ted put in.

He was too late. Maggie had pressed the "accept" button on her handset and a crate of a dozen king-size Tingle-limes appeared, amid a faint ozonic crackling, on the small catwalk attached to the front of the proscenium. The exec lifted the crate, carried it to Maggie's chair and with a flourish opened one of the plastic bottles.

Maggie took it and sipped the green liquid eagerly.

"It's perfect—even better than the stuff we get at the store."

"It ought to be. Anything you buy in a store is bound to have been on the shelves for some time, possibly months, but goods you buy through Telemart Three are created specially for you on the instant of purchase."

"How can that be?" Ted felt he had been silent too long. "As I understand it, there has to be a crate of Tingle-limes at the broadcasting station. It gets scanned with Roentgen rays and the details of its molecular structure are broadcast on a separate channel from the one which carries the programs and commercials. Right?"

"That's true, but—"

"If someone presses the 'accept' button, the molecular blueprint coming through at that time is used to build up a replica of the transmitted object from the raw materials bank in the basement. Right?"

"Right again, but—"

"So how do we know the original crate of pop hasn't been lying on a shelf at the station, possibly for months?"

"You know because the Telemart Corporation stands on its word as given in this brochure," the exec said in a hurt voice. He

*(Please turn to page 149)*

CLIFFORD SIMAK

# THE THING IN THE STONE



***He was judged and damned to hell—and hell was Earth . . . .***



## I

HE WALKED the hills and knew what the hills had seen through geologic time. He listened to the stars and spelled out what the stars were saying. He had found the creature that lay imprisoned in the stone. He had climbed the tree that in other days had been climbed by homing wildcats to reach the den gouged by time and weather out of the cliff's sheer face. He lived alone on a worn-out farm perched on a high and narrow ridge that overlooked the confluence of two rivers. And his next-door neighbor, a most ill-favored man, drove to the county seat, thirty miles away, to tell the

sheriff that this reader of the hills, this listener to the stars was a chicken thief.

THE sheriff dropped by within a week or so and walked across the yard to where the man was sitting in a rocking chair on a porch that faced the river hills. The sheriff came to a halt at the foot of the stairs that ran up to the porch.

"I'm Sheriff Harley Shepherd," he said. "I was just driving by. Been some years since I been out in this neck of the woods. You are new here, aren't you?"

The man rose to his feet and gestured at another chair. "Been here three years or so," he said. "The name is Wallace Daniels. Come up and sit with me."

The sheriff climbed the stairs and the two shook hands, then sat down in the chairs.

"You don't farm the place," the sheriff said.

The weed-grown fields came up to the fence that hemmed in the yard.

Daniels shook his head. "Subsistence farming, if you can call it that. A few chickens for eggs. A couple of cows for milk and butter. Some hogs for meat—the neighbors help me butcher. A garden, of course, but that's about the story."

"Just as well," the sheriff said. "The place is all played out. Old Amos Williams, he let it go to ruin. He never was no farmer."

"The land is resting now," said Daniels. "Give it ten years—twenty might be better—and it will ready ônce again. The only things it's good for now are the rabbits and the woodchucks and the meadow mice. A lot of birds, of course. I've got the finest covey of quail a man has ever seen."

"Used to be good squirrel country," said the sheriff. "Coon, too. I suppose you still have coon. You a hunter, Mr. Daniels?"

"I don't own a gun," said Daniels.

The sheriff settled deeply into the chair, rocking gently.

"Pretty country out here," he declared. "Especially with the leaves turning colors. A lot of hardwood and they are colorful. Rough as all hell, of course, this land of yours. Straight up and down, the most of it. But pretty."

"It's old country," Daniels said. "The last sea retreated from this area more than four hundred million years ago. It has stood as dry land since the end of the Silurian. Unless you go up north, onto the Canadian Shield, there aren't many places in this country you can find as old as this."

"You a geologist, Mr. Daniels?"

"Not really. Interested, is all. The rankest amateur. I need something to fill in my time and I do a lot of hiking, scrambling up and down these hills. And you can't do that without coming face to face with a lot of geology. I got interested. Found some fossil brachio-

pods and got to wondering about them. Sent off for some books and read up on them. One thing led to another and—"

"Brachiopods? Would they be dinosaurs, or what? I never knew there were dinosaurs out this way."

"Not dinosaurs," said Daniels. "Earlier than dinosaurs, at least the ones I found. They're small. Something like clams or oysters. But the shells are hinged in a different sort of way. These were old ones, extinct millions of years ago. But we still have a few brachiopods living now. Not too many of them."

"It must be interesting."

"I find it so," said Daniels.

"You knew old Amos Williams?"

"No. He was dead before I came here. Bought the land from the bank that was settling his estate."

"QUEER old coot," the sheriff said. "Fought with all his neighbors. Especially with Ben Adams. Him and Ben had a line fence feud going on for years. Ben said Amos refused to keep up the fence. Amos claimed Ben knocked it down and then sort of, careless-like, hazed his cattle over into Amos's hayfield. How you get along with Ben?"

"All right," Daniels said. "No trouble. I scarcely know the man."

"Ben don't do much farming, either," said the sheriff. "Hunts and fishes, hunts ginseng, does some trapping in the winter. Prospects for minerals now and then."

"There are minerals in these hills," said Daniels. "Lead and zinc. But it would cost more to get it out than it would be worth. At present prices, that is."

"Ben always has some scheme cooking," said the sheriff. "Always off on some wild goose chase. And he's a pure pugnacious man. Always has his nose out of joint about something. Always on the prod for trouble. Bad man to have for an enemy. Was in the other day to say someone's been lifting a hen or two of his. You haven't been missing any, have you?"

Daniels grinned. "There's a fox that levies a sort of tribute on the coop every now and then. I don't begrudge them to him."

"Funny thing," the sheriff said. "There ain't nothing can rile up a farmer like a little chicken stealing. It don't amount to shucks, of course, but they get real hostile at it."

"If Ben has been losing chickens," Daniels said, "more than likely the culprit is my fox."

"Your fox? You talk as if you own him."

"Of course I don't. No one owns a fox. But he lives in these hills with me. I figure we are neighbors. I see him every now and then and watch him. Maybe that means I own a piece of him. Although I wouldn't be surprised if he watches me more than I watch him. He

moves quicker than I do."

The sheriff heaved himself out of the chair.

"I hate to go," he said. "I declare it has been restful sitting here and talking with you and looking at the hills. You look at them a lot, I take it."

"Quite a lot," said Daniels.

HE SAT on the porch and watched the sheriff's car top the rise far down the ridge and disappear from sight.

What had it all been about? He wondered. The sheriff hadn't just happened to be passing by. He'd been on an errand. All his aimless, friendly talk had not been for nothing and in the course of it he'd managed to ask lots of questions.

Something about Ben Adams, maybe? Except there wasn't too much against Adams except he was bone-lazy. Lazy in a weasely sort of way. Maybe the sheriff had gotten wind of Adam's off-and-on moonshining operation and was out to do some checking, hoping that some neighbor might misspeak himself. None of them would, of course, for it was none of their business, really, and the moonshining had built up no nuisance value. What little liquor Ben might make didn't amount to much. He was too lazy for anything he did to amount to much.

From far down the hill he heard the tinkle of a bell. The two cows were finally heading home. It must be much later, Daniels told himself, than he had thought. Not that he paid much attention to what time it was. He hadn't for long months on end, ever since he'd smashed his watch when he'd fallen off the ledge. He had never bothered to have the watch fixed. He didn't need a watch. There was a battered old alarm clock in the kitchen but it was an erratic piece of mechanism and not to be relied upon. He paid slight attention to it.

In a little while, he thought, he'd have to rouse himself and go and do the chores—milk the cows, feed the hogs and chickens, gather up the eggs. Since the garden had been laid by there hadn't been much to do. One of these days he'd have to bring in the squashes and store them in the cellar and there were those three or four big pumpkins he'd have to lug down the hollow to the Perkins kids, so they'd have them in time to make jack-o-lanterns for Hallowe'en. He wondered if he should carve out the faces himself or if the kids would rather do it on their own.

But the cows were still quite a distance away and he still had time. He sat easy in his chair and stared across the hills.

And they began to shift and change as he stared.

When he had first seen it, the phenomenon had scared him silly. But now he was used to it.

As he watched, the hills changed

into different ones. Different vegetation and strange life stirred on them.

HE SAW dinosaurs this time. A herd of them, not very big ones. Middle Triassic, more than likely. And this time it was only a distant view—he, himself, was not to become involved. He would only see, from a distance, what ancient time was like and would not be thrust into the middle of it as most often was the case.

He was glad. There were chores to do.

Watching, he wondered once again what more he could do. It was not the dinosaurs that concerned him, or the earlier amphibians, or all the other creatures that moved in time about the hills.

What disturbed him was that other being that lay buried deep beneath the Platteville limestone.

Someone else should know about it. The knowledge of it should be kept alive so that in the days to come—perhaps in another hundred years—when man's technology had reached the point where it was possible to cope with such a problem, something could be done to contact—and perhaps to free—the dweller in the stone.

There would be a record, of course, a written record. He would see to that. Already that record was in progress—a week by week. (at times a day to day) account of what he had seen, heard and learned. Three large record books now were filled with his careful writing and another one was well started. All written down as honestly and as carefully and as objectively as he could bring himself to do it.

But who would believe what he had written? More to the point, who would bother to look at it? More than likely the books would gather dust on some hidden shelf until the end of time with no human hand ever laid upon them. And even if someone, in some future time, should take them down and read them, first blowing away the accumulated dust, would he or she be likely to believe?

The answer lay clear. He must convince someone. Words written by a man long dead—and by a man of no reputation—could be easily dismissed as the product of a neurotic mind. But if some scientist of solid reputation could be made to listen, could be made to endorse the record, the events that paraded across these hills and lay within them could stand on solid ground, worthy of full investigation at some future date.

A biologist? Or a neuropsychiatrist. Or a paleontologist?

Perhaps it didn't matter what branch of science the man was in. Just so he'd listen without laughter. It was most important that he listen without laughter.

Sitting on the porch, staring at the hills dotted with grazing dino-

saurs, the listener to the stars remembered the time he had gone to see the palaeontologist.

"BEN," the sheriff said, "you're way out in left field. That Daniels fellow wouldn't steal no chickens. He's got chickens of his own."

"The question is," said Adams, "how did he get them chickens?"

"That makes no sense," the sheriff said. "He's a gentleman. You can tell that just by talking with him. An educated gentleman."

"If he's a gentleman," asked Adams, "what's he doing out here? This ain't no place for gentlemen. He showed up two or three years ago and moved out to this place. Since that day he hasn't done a tap of work. All he does is wander up and down the hills."

"He's a geologist," said the sheriff. "Or anyway interested in geology. A sort of hobby with him. He tells me he looks for fossils."

Adams assumed the alert look of a dog that has sighted a rabbit. "So that is it," he said. "I bet you it ain't fossils he is looking for."

"No," the sheriff said.

"He's looking for minerals," said Adams. "He's prospecting, that's what he's doing. These hills crawl with minerals. All you have to do is know where to look."

"You've spent a lot of time looking," observed the sheriff.

"I ain't no geologist. A geologist would have a big advantage. He would know rocks and such."

"He didn't talk as if he were doing any prospecting. Just interested in the geology, is all. He found some fossil clams."

"He might be looking for treasure caves," said Adams. "He might have a map or something."

"You know damn well," the sheriff said, "there are no treasure caves."

"There must be," Adams insisted. "The French and Spanish were here in the early days. They were great ones for treasure, the French and Spanish. Always running after mines. Always hiding things in caves. There was that cave over across the river where they found a skeleton in Spanish armor and the skeleton of a bear beside him, with a rusty sword stuck into where the bear's gizzard was."

"That was just a story," said the sheriff, disgusted. "Some damn fool started it and there was nothing to it. Some people from the university came out and tried to run it down. It developed that there wasn't a word of truth in it."

"But Daniels has been messing around with caves," said Adams. "I've seen him. He spends a lot of time in that cave down on Cat Den Point. Got to climb a tree to get to it."

"You been watching him?"

"Sure I been watching him. He's up to something and I want to know what it is."

"Just be sure he doesn't catch you doing it," the sheriff said.

ADAMS chose to let the matter pass. "Well, anyhow," he said, "if there aren't any treasure caves, there's a lot of lead and zinc. The man who finds it is about to make a million."

"Not unless he can find the capital to back him," the sheriff pointed out.

Adams dug at the ground with his heel. "You think he's all right, do you?"

"He tells me he's been losing some chickens to a fox. More than likely that's what has been happening to yours."

"If a fox is taking his chickens," Adams asked, "why don't he shoot it?"

"He isn't sore about it. He seems to think the fox has got a right to. He hasn't even got a gun."

"Well, if he hasn't got a gun and doesn't care to hunt himself—then why won't he let other people hunt? He won't let me and my boys on his place with a gun. He has his place all posted. That seems to me to be unneighborly. That's one of the things that makes it so hard to get along with him. We've always hunted on that place. Old Amos wasn't an easy man to get along with but he never cared if we did some hunting. We've always hunted all around here. No one ever minded. Seems to me hunting should be free. Seems right for a man to hunt wherever he's a mind to."

Sitting on the bench on the hard-packed earth in front of the ramshackle house, the sheriff looked about him—at the listlessly scratching chickens, at the scrawny hound sleeping in the shade, its hide twitching against the few remaining flies, at the clothesline strung between two trees and loaded with drying clothes and dish towels, at the washtub balanced on its edge on a wash bench leaning against the side of the house.

Christ, he thought, the man should be able to find the time to put up a decent clothesline and not just string a rope between two trees.

"Ben," he said, "you're just trying to stir up trouble. You resent Daniels, a man living on a farm who doesn't work at farming and you're sore because he won't let you hunt his land. He's got a right to live anywhere he wants to and he's got a right not to let you hunt. I'd lay off him if I were you. You don't have to like him, you don't have to have anything to do with him—but don't go around spreading fake accusations against the man. He could jerk you up in court for that."

## II

HE HAD walked into the paleontologist's office and it had taken him a moment finally to

see the man seated toward the back of the room at a cluttered desk. The entire place was cluttered. There were long tables covered with chunks of rock with embedded fossils. Scattered here and there were stacks of papers. The room was large and badly lighted. It was a dingy and depressing place.

"Doctor?" Daniels had asked. "Are you Dr. Thorne?"

The man rose and deposited a pipe in a cluttered ash tray. He was big, burly, with graying hair that had a wild look to it. His face was seamed and weather-beaten. When he moved he shuffled like a bear.

"You must be Daniels," he said. "Yes, I see you must be. I had you on my calendar for three o'clock. So glad you could come."

His great paw engulfed Daniel's hand. He pointed to a chair beside the desk, sat down and retrieved his pipe from the overflowing tray, began packing it from a large canister that stood on the desk.

"Your letter said you wanted to see me about something important," he said. "But then that's what they all say. But there must have been something about your letter—an urgency, a sincerity. I haven't the time, you understand, to see everyone who writes. All of them have found something, you see. What is it, Mr. Daniels, that you have found?"

Daniels said, "Doctor, I don't quite know how to start what I have to say. Perhaps it would be best to tell you first that something had happened to my brain."

Thorne was lighting his pipe. He talked around the stem. "In such a case, perhaps I am not the man you should be talking to. There are other people—"

"No, that's not what I mean," said Daniels. "I'm not seeking help. I am quite all right physically and mentally, too. About five years ago I was in a highway accident. My wife and daughter were killed and I was badly hurt and—"

"I am sorry, Mr. Daniels."

"Thank you—but that is all in the past. It was rough for a time but I muddled through it. That's not what I'm here for. I told you I was badly hurt—"

"Brain damage?"

"Only minor. Or so far as the medical findings are concerned. Very minor damage that seemed to clear up rather soon. The bad part was the crushed chest and punctured lung."

"But you're all right now?"

"As good as new," said Daniels. "But since the accident my brain's been different. As if I had new senses. I see things, understand things that seem impossible."

"You mean you have hallucinations?"

"Not hallucinations. I am sure of that. I can see the past."

"How do you mean—see the past?"

"Let me try to tell you," Daniels

said, "exactly how it started. Several years ago I bought an abandoned farm in southwestern Wisconsin. A place to hole up in, a place to hide away. With my wife and daughter gone I still was recoiling from the world. I had gotten through the first brutal shock but I needed a place where I could lick my wounds. If this sounds like self-pity—I don't mean it that way. I am trying to be objective about why I acted as I did, why I bought the farm."

"Yes, I understand," said Thorne. "But I'm not entirely sure hiding was the wisest thing to do."

"Perhaps not, but it seemed to me the answer. It has worked out rather well. I fell in love with the country. That part of Wisconsin is ancient land. It had stood uncovered by the sea for four hundred million years. For some reason it was not overridden by the Pleistocene glaciers. It has changed, of course, but only as the result of weathering. There have been no great geologic upheavals, no massive erosions—nothing to disturb it."

"Mr. Daniels," said Thorne, somewhat testily, "I don't quite see what all this has to do—"

"I'm sorry. I am just trying to lay the background for what I came to tell you. It came on rather slowly at first and I thought that I was crazy, that I was seeing things, that there had been more brain damage than had been apparent—or that I was finally cracking up. I did a lot of walking in the hills, you see. The country is wild and rugged and beautiful—a good place to be out in. The walking made me tired and I could sleep at night. But at times the hills changed. Only a little at first. Later on they changed more and finally they became places I had never seen before, that no one had ever seen before."

Thorne scowled. "You are trying to tell me they changed into the past."

DANIELS nodded. "Strange vegetation, funny-looking trees. In the earlier times, of course, no grass at all. Underbrush of ferns and scouring rushes. Strange animals, strange things in the sky. Sabretooth cats and mastodons, pterosaurs and uintatheres and—"

"All at the same time?" Thorne asked, interrupting. "All mixed up?"

"Not at all. The time periods I see seem to be true time periods. Nothing out of place. I didn't know at first—but when I was able to convince myself that I was not hallucinating I sent away for books. I studied. I'll never be an expert, of course—never a geologist or paleontologist—but I learned enough to distinguish one period from another, to have some idea of what I was looking at."

Thorne took his pipe out of his

mouth and perched it in the ash tray. He ran a massive hand through his wild hair.

It's unbelievable," he said. "It simply couldn't happen. You said all this business came on rather slowly?"

"To begin with it was hazy, the past foggily imposed upon the present, then the present would slowly fade and the past came in, real and solid. But it's different now. Once in a while there's a bit of flickering as the present gives way to past—but mostly it simply changes, as if at the snap of a finger. The present goes away and I'm standing in the past. The past is all around me. Nothing of the present is left."

"But you aren't really in the past? Physically, I mean."

"There are times when I'm not in it at all. I stand in the present and the distant hills or the river valley changes. But ordinarily it changes all around me, although the funny thing about it is that, as you say, I'm not really in it. I can see it and it seems real enough for me to walk around in it. I can walk over to a tree and put my hand out to feel it and the tree is there. But I seem to make no impact on the past. It's as if I were not there at all. The animals do not see me. I've walked up to within a few feet of dinosaurs. They can't see me or hear or smell me. If they had I'd have been dead a dozen times. It's as if I were walking through a three-dimensional movie. At first I worried a lot about the surface differences that might exist. I'd wake up dreaming of going into the past and being buried up to my waist in a rise of ground that since has eroded away. But it doesn't work that way. I'm walking along in the present and then I'm walking in the past. It's as if a door were there and I stepped through it. I told you I don't really seem to be in the past—but I'm not in the present, either. I tried to get some proof. I took a camera with me and shot a lot of pictures. When the films were developed there was nothing on them. Not the past—but what is more important, not the present, either. If I had been hallucinating, the camera should have caught pictures of the present. But apparently there was nothing there for the camera to take. I thought maybe the camera failed or I had the wrong kind of film. So I tried several cameras and different types of film and nothing happened. I got no pictures. I tried bringing something back. I picked flowers, after there were flowers. I had no trouble picking them but when I came back to the present I was empty-handed. I tried to bring back other things as well. I thought maybe it was only live things, like flowers, that I couldn't bring, so I tried inorganic things—like rocks—but I never was able to bring anything back."

"How about a sketch pad?"

"I thought of that but I never used one. I'm no good at sketching—besides, I figured, what was the use. The pad would come back blank."

"But you never tried."

"No," said Daniels. "I never tried. Occassionally I do make sketches after I get back to the present. Not every time but sometimes. From memory. But, as I said, I'm not very good at sketching."

"I don't know," said Thorne. "I don't really know. This all sounds incredible. But if there should be something to it— Tell me, were you ever frightened? You seem quite calm and matter-of-fact about it now. But at first you must have been frightened."

"At first," said Daniels, "I was petrified. Not only was I scared, physically scared—frightened for my safety, frightened that I'd fallen into a place from which I never could escape—but also afraid that I'd gone insane. And there was the loneliness."

"What do you mean—loneliness?"

"Maybe that's not the right word. Out of place. I was where I had no right to be. Lost in a place where man had not as yet appeared and would not appear for millions of years. In a word so utterly alien that I wanted to hunker down and shiver. But I, not the place, was really the alien there. I still get some of that feeling every now and then. I know about it, of course, and am braced against it but at times it still gets to me. I'm a stranger to the air and the light of that other time—it's all imagination, of course."

"Not necessarily," said Thorne.

"But the greatest fear is gone now, entirely gone. The fear I was insane. I am convinced now."

"How are you convinced? How could a man be convinced?"

"The animals. The creatures I see—"

"You mean you recognize them from the illustrations in those books you have been reading."

"No, not that. Not entirely that. Of course the pictures helped. But actually it's the other way around. Not the likenesses, but the differences. You see, none of the creatures are exactly like the pictures in the books. Some of them not at all like them. Not like the reconstructions the paleontologists put together. If they had been I might still have thought they were hallucinations, that what I was seeing was influenced by what I'd seen or read. I could have been feeding my imagination on prior knowledge. But since that was not the case, it seemed logical to assume that what I see is real. How could I imagine that Tyrannosaurus had dewlaps all the colors of the rainbow. How could I imagine that some of the sabertooths had tassels on their ears? How could anyone possibly imagine that the big

thunder beasts of the Eocene had hides as colorful as giraffes?"

"Mr. Daniels," said Thorne, "I have great reservations about all that you have told me. Every fiber of my training rebels against it. I have a feeling that I should waste no time on it. Undoubtedly, you believe what you have told me. You have the look of an honest man about you. Have you talked to any other men about this? Any other paleontologists or geologists? Perhaps a neuropsychiatrist?"

"No," said Daniels. "You're the only person, the only man I have talked with. And I haven't told you all of it. This is really all just background."

"My God, man—just background?"

"Yes, just background. You see, I also listen to the stars."

Thorne got up from his chair, began shuffling together a stack of papers. He retrieved the dead pipe from the ash tray and stuck it in his mouth.

His voice, when he spoke, was noncommittal.

"Thank you for coming in," he said. "It's been most interesting."

## III

AND that was where he had made his mistake, Daniels told himself. He never should have mentioned listening to the stars. His interview had gone well until he had. Thorne had not believed him, of course, but he had been intrigued, would have listened further, might even have pursued the matter, although undoubtedly secretly and very cautiously.

At fault, Daniels knew, had been his obsession with the creature in the stone. The past was nothing—it was the creature in the stone that was important and to tell of it, to explain it and how he knew that it was there, he must tell about his listening to the stars.

He should have known better, he told himself. He should have held his tongue. But here had been a man who, while doubting, still had been willing to listen without laughter and, in his thankfulness Daniels had spoken too much.

The wick of the oil lamp set upon the kitchen table guttered in the air currents that came in around the edges of the ill-fitting windows. A wind had risen after chores were done and now shook the house with galelike blasts. On the far side of the room the fire in the wood-burning stove threw friendly, wavering flares of light across the floor and the stovepipe, in response to the wind that swept the chimney top, made gurgling, sucking sounds.

Thorne had mentioned a neuropsychiatrist, Daniels remembered, and perhaps that was the kind of man he should have gone to see. Perhaps, before he attempted to interest anyone in what he could

see or hear, he should make an effort to find out why and how he could hear and see these things. A man who studied the workings of the brain and mind might come up with new answers—if answers were to be had.

Had that blow upon his head so rearranged, so shifted some process in his brain that he had gained new capabilities? Was it possible that his brain had been so jarred, so disarranged as to bring into play certain latent talents that possibly, in millennia to come, might have developed naturally by evolutionary means? Had the brain damage short-circuited evolution and given him—and him alone—these capabilities, these senses, perhaps a million years ahead of time?

It seemed—well, not reasonable but one possible explanation. Still, A trained man night have some other explanation.

He pushed his chair back from the table and walked over to the stove. He used the lifter to raise the lid of the rickety old cook stove. The wood in the firebox had burned down to embers. Stooping, he picked up a stick of wood from the woodbox and fitted it in, added another smaller one and replaced the lid. One of these days soon, he told himself, he would have to get the furnace in shape for operation.

He went out to stand on the porch, looking toward the river hills. The wind whooped out of the north, whistling around the corners of the building and booming in the deep hollows that ran down to the river but the sky was clear—steely clear, wiped fresh by the wind and sprinkled with stars, their light shivering in the raging atmosphere.

Looking up at the stars, he wondered what they might be saying but he didn't try to listen. It took a lot of effort and concentration to listen to the stars. He had first listened to them on a night like this, standing out here on the porch and wondering what they might be saying, wondering if the stars did talk among themselves. A foolish, vagrant thought, a wild, daydreaming sort of notion but, voicing it, he had tried to listen, knowing even as he did that it was foolishness but glorying in his foolishness, telling himself how fortunate he was that he could afford to be so inane as to try to listen to the stars—as a child might believe in Santa Claus or the Easter rabbit. He'd listened and he'd heard and while he'd been astonished, there could be no doubt about it, no doubt at all that out there somewhere other beings were talking back and forth. He might have been listening in on a party line, he thought, but a party line that carried millions, perhaps billions, of long-distance conversations. Not words, of course, but something (thought, perhaps) that was

as plain as words. Not all of it understandable—much of it, as a matter of fact, not understandable—possibly because his background and his learning gave him no basis for an understanding. He compared himself to an Australian aborigine listening to the conversation of a couple of nuclear physicists discussing a new theory.

Shortly after that, when he had been exploring the shallow cave down on Cat Den Point, he had picked up his first indication of the creature buried in the stone. Perhaps, he thought, if he'd not listened to the stars, if he'd not known he could listen to the stars, if he'd not trained his mind by listening, he would not have heard the creature buried deep beneath the limestone.

He stood looking at the stars and listening to the wind and, far across the river, on a road that wound over the distant hills, he caught the faint glimmer of headlights as a car made it way through the night. The wind let up for a moment, as if gathering its strength to blow yet even harder and, in the tiny lull that existed before the wind took up again, he heard another sound—the sound of an axe hitting wood. He listened carefully and the sound came again but so tossed about by the wind that he could not be sure of its direction.

He must be mistaken, he thought. No one would be out and chopping on a night like this. Coon hunters might be the answer. Coon hunters at times chopped down a tree to dislodge a prey too well hidden to be spotted. The unsportsmanlike trick was one that Ben Adams and his overgrown, gangling sons might engage in. But this was no night for coon hunting. The wind would blow away scent and the dogs would be unable to track. Quiet nights were the best for hunting coon. And no one would be insane enough to cut down a tree on a night like this when a swirling wind might catch it and topple it back upon the cutters.

He listened to catch the sound again but the wind, recovering from its lull, was blowing harder than ever now and there was no chance of hearing any sound smaller than the wind.

THE next day came in mild and gray, the wind no more than a whisper. Once in the night Daniels had awoken to hear it rattling the windows, pounding at the house and howling mournfully in the tangled hollows that lay above the river. But when he woke again all was quiet and faint light was graying the windows. Dressed and out of doors he found a land of peace—the sky so overcast that there was no hint of sun, the air fresh, as if newly washed but heavy with the moist grayness that overlay the land. The autumn foliage

that clothes the hills had taken on a richer luster than it had worn in the flooding autumn sunlight.

After chores and breakfast Daniels set out for the hills. As he went down the slope toward the head of the first hollow he found himself hoping that the geologic shift would not come about today. There were many times it didn't and there seemed to be no reason to its taking place or its failure to take place. He had tried at times to find some reason for it, had made careful notes of how he felt or what he did, even the course he took when he went for his daily walk, but he had found no pattern. It lay, of course, somewhere in his brain—something triggered into operation his new capability. But the phenomenon was random and involuntary. He had no control of it, no conscious control, at least. At times he had tried to use it, to bring the geologic shift about—in each case had failed. Either he did not know how to go about it or it was truly random.

Today, he hoped, his capability would not exercise its option, for he wanted to walk in the hills when they had assumed one of their most attractive moods, filled with gentle melancholy, all their harshness softened by the grayness of the atmosphere, the trees standing silently like old and patient friends waiting for one's coming, the fallenleaves and forest mold so hushed footfalls made no sound.

He went down to the head of the hollow and sat on a fallen log beside a gushing spring that sent a stream of water tinkling down the boulder-strewn creek bed. Here, in May, in the pool below the spring, the marsh marigolds had bloomed and the sloping hillsides had been covered with the pastel of hepaticas. But now he saw no sign of either. The woods had battened down for winter. The summer and the autumn plants were either dead or dying, the drifting leaves interlocking on the forest floor to form cover against the ice and snow.

In this place, thought Daniels, a man walked with a season's ghosts. This was the way it had been for a million years or more, although not always. During many millions of years, in a time long gone, these hills and all the world had basked in an eternal summertime. And perhaps not a great deal more than ten thousand years before a mile-high wall of ice had reared up not too far to the north, perhaps close enough for a man who stood where his house now sat might have seen the faint line of blueness that would have been the top of that glacial barrier. But even then, although the mean temperature would have been lower, there had still been seasons.

Leaving the log, Daniels went on down the hollow, following the narrow path that looped along the hillside, a cowpath beaten down at a time when there had been more

cows at pasture in these woods than the two that Daniels owned. Following it, Daniels noted, as he had many times before, the excellent engineering sense of a cow. Cows always chose the easiest grade in stamping out their paths.

He stopped barely beyond the huge white oak that stood at a bend in the path, to have a look at the outsize jack-in-the-pulpit plant he had observed throughout the year. Its green-purple hood had withered away completely, leaving only the scarlet fruit cluster which in the bitter months ahead would serve as food for birds.

As the path continued, it plunged deeper between the hills and here the silence deepened and the grayness thickened until one's world became private.

There, across the stream bed, was the den. Its yellow maw gaped beneath a crippled, twisted cedar. There, in the spring, he had watched baby foxes play. From far down the hollow came the distant quacking of ducks upon the pond in the river valley. And up on the steep hillside loomed Cat Den Point, the den carved by slow-working wind and weather out of the sheer rock of the cliff.

But something was wrong.

STANDING on the path and looking up the hill, he could sense the wrongness, although he could not at first tell exactly what it was. More of the cliff face was visible and something was missing. Suddenly he knew that the tree was no longer there—the tree that for years had been climbed by homing wildcats heading for the den after a night of prowling and later by humans like himself who wished to seek out the wildcat's den. The cats, of course, were no longer there—had not been there for many years. In the pioneer days they had been hunted almost to extermination because at times they had exhibited the poor judgment of bringing down a lamb. But the evidence of their occupancy of the cave could still be found by anyone who looked. Far back in the narrow recesses of the shallow cave tiny bones and the fragmented skulls of small mammals gave notice of food brought home by the wildcats for their young.

The tree had been old and gnarled and had stood, perhaps, for several centuries and there would have been no sense of anyone's cutting it down, for it had no value as lumber, twisted as it was. And in any case to get it out of the woods would have been impossible. Yet, last night, when he had stepped out on the porch, he had seemed to hear in a lull in the wind the sound of chopping—and today the tree was gone.

Unbelieving, he scrambled up the slope as swiftly as he could. In places the slope of the wild hillside slanted at an angle so close to

forty-five degrees that he went on hands and knees, clawing himself upward, driven by an illogical fear that had to do with more than simply a missing tree.

For it was in the cat den that one could hear the creature buried in the stone.

He could recall the day he first had heard the creature and on that day he had not believed his senses. For he had been sure the sound came from his own imagination, was born of his walking with the dinosaurs and eavesdropping on the stars. It had not come the first time he had climbed the tree to reach the cave-that-was-a-den. He had been there several times before, finding a perverse satisfaction at discovering so unlikely a retreat. He would sit on the ledge that ran before the cave and stare over the froth of treetop foliage that clothed the plunging hillside, but afforded a glimpse of the pond that lay in the flood plain of the river. He could not see the river itself—one must stand on higher ground to see the river.

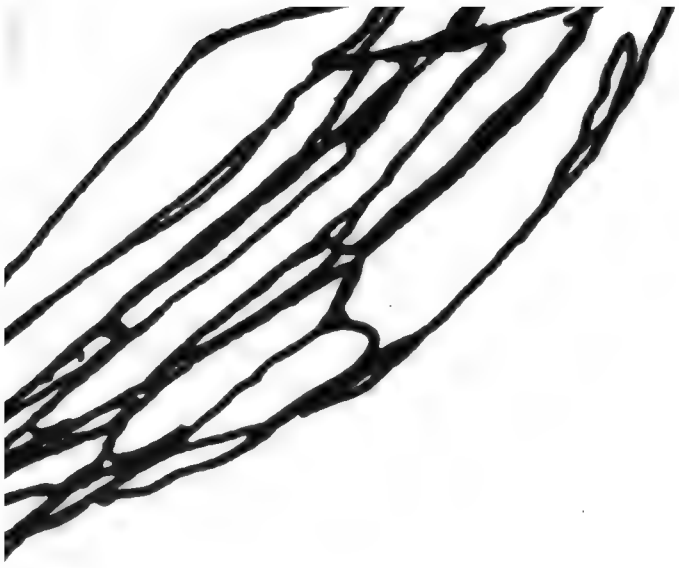
He liked the cave and the ledge because it gave him seclusion, a place cut off from the world, where he still might see this restricted corner of the world but no one could see him. This same sense of being shut out from the world had appealed to the wildcats, he had told himself. And here, for them, not only was seclusion but safety —and especially safety for their young. There was no way the den could be approached other than by climbing the tree.

He had first heard the creature when he had crawled into the deepest part of the shallow cave to marvel at the little heaps of bones and small shattered skulls where the wildcat kittens, perhaps a century before, had crouched and snarled at feast. Crouching where the baby wildcats once had crouched, he had felt the presence welling up at him, coming up to him from the depth of stone that lay far beneath him. Only the presence at first, only the knowing that something was down there. He had been skeptical at first, later on believing. In time belief had become solid certainty.

He could record no words, of course, for he had never heard any actual sound. But the intelligence and the knowing came creeping through his body, through his fingers spread flat upon the stone floor of the cave, through his knees, which also pressed the stone. He absorbed it without hearing and the more he absorbed the more he was convinced that deep in the limestone, buried in one of the strata, an intelligence was trapped. And finally the time came when he could catch fragments of thoughts —the edges of the *living* in the sentience encysted in the rock.

What he heard he did not understand. This very lack of understanding was significant. If he had







understood he would have put his discovery down to his imagination. As matters stood he had no knowledge that could possibly have served as a spring-board to imagine the thing of which he was made aware. He caught an awareness of tangled life relationships which made no sense at all—none of which could be understood, but which lay in tiny, tangled fragments of outrageous (yet simple) information no human mind could quite accept. And he was made to know the empty hollowness of distances so vast that the mind reeled at the very hint of them and of the naked emptiness in which those distances must lie. Even in his eavesdropping on the stars he had never experienced such devastating concepts of the other-where-and-when. There was other information, scraps and bits he sensed faintly that might fit into mankind's knowledge. But he never found enough to discover the proper slots for their insertion into the mass of mankind's knowledge. The greater part of what he sensed, however, was simply beyond his grasp and perhaps beyond the grasp of any human. But even so his mind would catch and hold it in all its incomprehensibility and it would lie there festering amid his human thoughts.

THEY were or it was, he knew, not trying to talk with him—undoubtedly they (or it) did not

know that such a thing as a man existed, let alone himself. But whether the creature (or creatures —he found the collective singular easier) simply was thinking or might, in its loneliness, be talking to itself—or whether it might be trying to communicate with something other than himself, he could not determine.

Thinking about it, sitting on the ledge before the cave, he had tried to make some logic of his find, had tried to find a way in which the creature's presence might be best explained. And while he could not be sure of it—in fact, had no data whatsoever to bolster his belief—he came to think that in some far geologic day when a shallow sea had lain upon this land, a ship from space had fallen into the sea to be buried deeply in the mud that in later millennia had hardened into limestone. In this manner the ship had become entrapped and so remained to this very day. He realized his reasoning held flaws—for one thing, the pressure involved in the fashioning of the stone must have been so great as to have crushed and flattened any ship unless it should be made of some material far beyond the range of man's technology.

Accident, he wondered, or a way of hiding? Trapped or planned? He had no way of knowing and further speculation was ridiculous, based as it necessarily must be upon earlier assumptions that were entirely without support.

Scrambling up the hillside, he finally reached the point where he could see that, in all truth, the tree had been cut down. It had fallen downhill and slid for thirty feet or so before it came to rest, its branches entangled with the trunks of other trees which had slowed its plunge. The stump stood raw, the whiteness of its wood shining in the grayness of the day. A deep cut had been made in the downhill side of it and the final felling had been accomplished by a saw. Little piles of brownish sawdust lay beside the stump. A two-man saw, he thought.

From where Daniels stood the hill slanted down at an abrupt angle but just ahead of him, just beyond the stump, was a curious mound that broke the hillside slope. In some earlier day, more than likely, great masses of stone had broken from the cliff face and piled up at its base, to be masked in time by the soil that came about from the forest litter. Atop the mound grew a clump of birch, their powdery white trunks looking like huddled ghosts against the darkness of the other trees.

The cutting of the tree, he told himself once again, had been a senseless pieces of business. The tree was worthless and had served no particular purpose except as a road to reach the den. Had someone, he wondered, known that he used it to reach the den and cut it

out of malice? Or had someone, perhaps, hidden something in the cave and then cut down the tree so there would be no way in which to reach it?

But who would hold him so much malice as to come out on a night raging with wind, working by lantern light, risking his life, to cut down the tree? Ben Adams? Ben was sore because Daniels would not permit hunting on his land but surely that was no sufficient reason for this rather laborious piece of petty spite.

The other alternative—that something hidden in the cave had caused the tree's destruction—seemed more likely, although the very cutting of the tree would serve to advertise the strangeness of the place.

Daniels stood puzzled, shaking his head. Then he thought of a way to find out some answers. The day still was young and he had nothing else to do.

He started climbing up the hill, heading for his barn to pick up some rope.

## IV

THERE was nothing in the cave. It was exactly as it had been before. A few autumn leaves had blown into the far corners. Chips of weathered stone had fallen from the rocky overhang, tiny evidences of the endless process of erosion which had formed the cave and in a few thousand years from now might wipe it out.

Standing on the narrow ledge in front of the cave, Daniels stared out across the valley and was surprised at the change of view that had resulted from the cutting of the tree. The angles of vision seemed somehow different and the hillside itself seemed changed. Startled, he examined the sweep of the slope closely and finally satisfied himself that all that had changed was his way of seeing it. He was seeing trees and contours that earlier had been masked.

His rope hung from the outcurving rock face that formed the roof of the cave. It was swaying gently in the wind and, watching it, Daniels recalled that earlier in the day he had felt no wind. But now one had sprang up from the west. Below him the treetops were bending to it.

He turned toward the west and felt the wind on his face and a breath of chill. The feel of the wind faintly disturbed him, rousing some atavistic warning that came down from the days when naked, roaming bands of protomen had turned, as he turned now, to sniff the coming weather. The wind might mean that a change of weather could be coming and perhaps he should clamber up the rope and head back for the farm.

But he felt a strange reluctance to leave. It had been often so, he recalled. For here was a wild sort

of refuge which barred out the world and the little world that it let in was a different kind—a more primal and more basic and less complicated world than the one he'd fled from.

A flight of mallards came winging up from the pond in the river valley, arrowing above the treetops, banking and slanting up the long curve of the bluff and then, having cleared the bluff top, wheeling gracefully back toward the river. He watched them until they dipped down behind the trees that fringed the unseen river.

Now it was time to go. There was no use of waiting longer. It had been a fool's errand in the first place; he had been wrong to let himself think something might be hidden in the cave.

He turned back to the rope and the rope was gone.

For a moment he stared stupidly at the point along the cliff face where the rope had hung, swaying in the breeze. Then he searched for some sign of it, although there was little area to search. The rope could have slid, perhaps, for a short distance along the edge of the overhanging mass of rock but it seemed incredible that it could have slid far enough to have vanished from his sight.

The rope was new, strong, and he had tied it securely to the oak tree on the bluff above the cliff, snugging it tightly around the trunk and testing the knot to make certain that it would not slip.

And now the rope was gone. There had to be a human hand in this. Someone had come along, seen the rope and quietly drawn it up and now was crouched on the bluff above him, waiting for his frightened outburst when he found himself stranded. It was the sort of crude practical joke that any number of people in the community might believe to be the height of humor. The thing to do, of course, was to pay no attention, to remain quiet and wait until the joke would pall upon the jokester.

So he hunkered down upon the ledge and waited. Ten minutes, he told himself, or at least fifteen, would wear out the patience of the jokester. Then the rope would come down and he could climb up and go back to the house. Depending upon who the joker might turn out to be, he'd take him home and pour a drink for him and the two of them, sitting in the kitchen, would have a laugh together.

He found that he was hunching his shoulders against the wind, which seemed to have a sharper bite than when he first had noticed it. It was shifting from the west to north and that was no good.

Squatting on the ledge, he noticed that beads of moisture had gathered upon his jacket sleeve—not a result of rain, exactly, but of driven mist. If the temperature should drop a bit the weather might turn nasty.

He waited, huddled, listening for a sound—a scuffling of feet through leaves, the snap of broken brush—that would betray the presence of someone on the clifftop. But there was no sound at all. The day was muffled. Even the branches of the trees beneath his perch, swaying in the wind, swayed without their usual creaks and groans.

Fifteen minutes must have passed and there had been no sound from atop the cliff. The wind had increased somewhat and when he twisted his head to one side to try to look up he could feel the soft slash of the driving mist against his cheek.

He could keep silent no longer in hope of waiting out the jokester. He sensed, in a sudden surge of panic, that time was running out on him.

"Hey, up there—" he shouted.

He waited and there was no response.

He shouted again, more loudly this time.

Ordinarily the cliff across the hollow should have bounced back echoes. But now there were no echoes and his shout seemed dampened, as if this wild place had erected some sort of fence to hem him in.

He shouted again and the misty world took his voice and swallowed it.

A hissing sound started. Daniels saw it was caused by tiny pellets of ice streaming through the branches of the trees. From one breath to another the driven mist had turned to ice.

He walked back and forth on the ledge in front of the cave, twenty feet at most, looking for some way of escape. The ledge went out into space and then sheered off. The slanting projection of rock came down from above. He was neatly trapped.

He moved back into the cave and hunkered down. Here he was protected from the wind and he felt, even through his rising panic, a certain sense of snugness. The cave was not yet cold. But the temperature must be dopping and dropping rather swiftly or the mist would not have turned to ice. He wore a light jacket and could not make a fire. He did not smoke and never carried matches.

FOR the first time he faced the real seriousness of his position. It might be days before anyone noticed he was missing. He had few visitors and no one had ever paid too much attention to him. Even if someone should find that he was missing and a hunt for him were launched, what were the chances that he would be found? Who would think to look in this hidden cave? How long, he wondered, could a man survive in cold and hunger.

If he could not get out of here, and soon, what about his live-

stock? The cows would be heading home from pasture, seeking shelter from the storm and there would be no one there to let them into the barn. If they were not milked for a day or two they would be tormented by swollen udders. The hogs and chickens would go unfed. A man, he thought, had no right to take the kind of chance he had taken when so many living creatures were dependent on him.

He crawled farther back into the cave and stretched himself out on his belly, wedging himself into its deepest recess, an ear laid against the stone.

The creature still was there—of course it still was there. It was trapped even more securely than himself, held down by, perhaps, several hundred feet of solid rock, which had been built up most deliberately through many millions of years.

It was remembering again. In its mind was another place and, while part of that flow of memory was blurred and wavy, the rest was starkly clear. A great dark plain of rock, one great slab of rock, ran to a far horizon and above that far horizon a reddish sun came up and limned against the great red ball of rising sun was a hinted structure—an irregularity of the horizon that suggested a place. A castle, perhaps, or a city or a great cliff dwelling—it was hard to make out what it was or to be absolutely sure that it was anything at all.

Home? Was that black expanse of rock the spaceport of the old home planet? Or might it be only a place the creature had visited before it had come to Earth? A place so fantastic, perhaps, that it lingered in the mind.

Other things mixed into the memory, sensory symbols that might have applied to personalities, life forms, smells, tastes. Although he could be wrong, Daniels knew, in supplying this entrapped creature with human sensory perceptions, these human sensory perceptions were the only ones he knew about.

And now, listening in on the memory of that flat black expanse of rock and imagining the rising sun which outlined the structure on the far horizon, Daniels did something he had never tried to do before. He tried to talk back to the buried creature, tried to let it know that someone was listening and had heard, that it was not as lonely and as isolated as it might have thought it was.

He did not talk with his tongue—that would have been a senseless thing to do. Sound could never carry through those many feet of stone. He talked with his mind instead.

*Hello, down there,* he said. *This is a friend of yours. I've been listening to you for a long, long time and I hope that you can hear me. If you can, let us talk together. Let me try to make you under-*

*stand about myself and the world I live in and you tell me about yourself and the kind of world you lived in and how you came to be where you are and if there is anything I can do for you, any help that I can give. . .*

He said that much and no more. Having spoken, he continued lying with his ear against the hard cave floor, listening to find out if the creature might have heard him. But the creature apparently had not heard or, having heard, ignored him as something not worth its attention. It went on thinking about the place where the dull red sun was rising above the horizon.

It had been foolish, and perhaps presumptuous, he knew, for him to have tried to speak to it. He had never tried before; he had simply listened. And he had never tried, either, to speak to those others who talked among the stars—again he'd simply listened.

What new dimension had been added to himself, he wondered, that would have permitted him to try to communicate with the creature? Had the possibility that he was about to die moved him?

The creature in the stone might not be subject to death—it might be immortal.

He crawled out of the far recess of the cave and crept out to where he had room to hunker down.

THE storm had worsened. The ice now was mixed with snow and the temperature had fallen. The ledge in front of the cave was filmed with slippery ice. If a man tried to walk it he'd go plunging down the cliff face to his death.

The wind was blowing harder. The branches of the trees were waving and a storm of leaves was banking down the hillside, flying with the ice and snow.

From where he squatted he could see the topmost branches of the clump of birches which grew atop the mound just beyond where the cave tree had stood. And these branches, it seemed to him, were waving about far more violently than could be accounted for by wind. They were lashing wildly from one side to the other and even as he watched they seemed to rise higher in the air, as if the trees, in some great agony, were raising their branches far above their heads in a plea for mercy.

Daniels crept forward on his hands and knees and thrust his head out to see down to the base of the cliff.

Not only the topmost branches of the clump of birches were swaying but the entire clump seemed to be motion, thrashing about as if some unseen hand were attempting to wrench it from the soil. But even as he thought this, he saw that the ground itself was in agitation, heaving up and out. It looked exactly as if someone had taken a time-lapse movie of the development of a frost boil with the film

now being run at a normal speed. The ground was heaving up and the clump was heaving with it. A shower of gravel and other debris was flowing down the slope, loosened by the heaving of the ground. A boulder broke away and crashed down the hill, crushing brush and shrubs and leaving hideous scars.

Daniels watched in horrified fascination.

Was he witnessing, he wondered, some wonderfully speeded-up geological process? He tried to pinpoint exactly what kind of process it might be. He knew of one that seemed to fit. The mound kept on heaving upward, splintering outward from its center. A great flood of loose debris was now pouring down the slope, leaving a path of brown in the whitness of the fallen snow. The clump of birch tipped over and went skidding down the slope and out of the place where it had stood a shape emerged.

Not a solid shape, but a hazy one that looked as if someone had scraped some stardust from the sky and molded it into a ragged, shifting form that did not set into any definite pattern, that kept shifting and changing, although it did not entirely lose all resemblance to the shape in which it might originally have been molded. It looked as a loose conglomeration of atoms might look if atoms could be seen. It sparkled softly in the grayness of the day and despite its seeming insubstantiality it apparently had some strength—for it continued to push itself from the shattered mound until finally it stood free of it.

Having freed itself, it drifted up toward the ledge.

Strangely, Daniels felt no fear, only a vast curiosity. He tried to make out what the drifting shape was but he could not be sure.

AS IT reached the ledge and moved slightly above it he drew back to crouch within the cave. The shape drifted in a couple of feet or so and perched on the ledge—either perched upon it or floated just above it.

*You spoke,* the sparkling shape said to Daniels.

It was not a question, nor a statement either, really, and it was not really speaking. It sounded exactly like the talk Daniels had heard when he'd listened to the stars.

*You spoke to it,* said the shape, *as if you were a friend (although the word was not friend but something else entirely, something warm and friendly). You offered help to it. Is there help that you can give?*

That question at least was clear enough.

"I don't know," said Daniels. "Not right now, there isn't. But in a hundred years from now, perhaps—are you hearing me? Do you know what I am saying?"

*You say there can be help,* the creature said, *but only after time. Please, what is that time?*

"A hundred years," said Daniels. "When the planet goes around the star one hundred times."

*One hundred?* asked the creature.

Daniels held up the fingers of both hands. "Can you see my fingers? The appendages on the tips of my arms?"

*See?* the creature asked.

"Sense them. Count them."

*Yes, I can count them.*

"They number ten," said Daniels. "Ten times that many of them would be a hundred."

*It is no great span of time,* the creature said. *What kind of help by then?*

"You know genetics? How a creature comes into being, how it knows what kind of thing it is to become, how it grows, how it knows how to grow and what to become. The amino acids that make up the ribonucleic acids and provide the key to the kind of cells it grows and what their functions are."

*I do not know your terms,* the creature said, *but I understand. So you know of this? You are not, then, a brute wild creature, like the other life that simply stands and the others that burrow in the ground and climb the standing life forms and run along the ground.*

It did not come out like this, of course. The words were there—or meanings that had the feel of words—but there were pictures as well of trees, of burrowing mice, of squirrels, of rabbits, of the lurching woodchuck and the running fox.

"Not I," said Daniels, "but others of my kind. I know but little of it. There are others who spend all their time in the study of it."

The other perched on the ledge and said nothing more. Beyond it the trees whipped in the wind and the snow came whirling down. Daniels huddled back from the ledge, shivered in the cold and wondered if this thing upon the ledge could be hallucination.

But as he thought it, the thing began to talk again, although this time it did not seem to be talking to him. It talked, rather, as the creature in the stone had talked, remembering. It communicated, perhaps, something he was not meant to know but Daniels had no way of keeping from knowing. Sentience flowed from the creature and impacted on his mind, filling all his mind, barring all else, so that it seemed as if it were he and not this other who was remembering.

## V

FIRST there was space—endless, limitless space, so far from everything, so brutal, so frigid, so uncaring that it numbed

the mind, not so much from fear or loneliness, as from the realization that in this eternity of space the thing that was himself was dwarfed to an insignificance no yardstick could measure. So far from home, so lost, so directionless—and yet not entirely directionless, for there was a trace, a scent, a spoor, a knowing that could not be expressed or understood or even guessed at in the framework of humanity; a trace, a scent, a spoor that showed the way, no matter how dimly or how hopelessly, that something else had taken at some other time. And a mindless determination, an unflagging devotion, a primal urgency that drove him on that faint, dim trail, to follow where it might lead, even to the end of time or space, or the both of them together, never to fail or quit or falter until the trail had finally reached an end or had been wiped out by whatever winds might blow through empty space.

There was something here, Daniels told himself, that, for all its alienness, still was familiar, a factor that should lend itself to translation into human terms and thus establish some sort of link between this remembering alien mind and his human mind.

The emptiness and the silence, the cold uncaring went on and on and on and there seemed no end to it. But he came to understand there had to be an end to it and that the end was here, in these tangled hills above the ancient river. And after the almost endless time of darkness and uncaring, another almost endless time of waiting, of having reached the end, of having gone as far as one might go and then settling down to wait with an ageless patience that never would grow weary.

*You spoke of help,* the creature said to him. *Why help? You do not know this other. Why should you want to help?*

"It is alive," said Daniels. "It's alive and I'm alive and is that not enough?"

*I do not know,* the creature said.

"I think it is," said Daniels.

*And how could you help?*

"I've told you about this business of genetics. I don't know if I can explain—"

*I have the terms from your mind,* the creature said. *The genetic code.*

"Would this other one, the one beneath the stone, the one you guard—"

*Not guard,* the creature said. *The one I wait for.*

"You will wait for long."

*I am equipped for waiting. I have waited long. I can wait much longer.*

"Someday," Daniels said, "the stone will erode away. But you need not wait that long. Does this other creature know its genetic code?"

*It knows,* the creature said. *It knows far more than I.*

"But all of it," insisted Daniels. "Down to the last linkage, the final ingredient, the sequences of all the billions of—"

*It knows,* the creature said. *The first requisite of all life is to understand itself.*

"And it could—it would—be willing to give us that information, to supply us its genetic code?"

*You are presumptuous,* said the sparkling creature, (although the word was harsher than presumptuous). *That is information no thing gives another. It is indecent and obscene* (here again the words were not exactly indecent and obscene). *It involves the giving of one's self into another's hands. It is an ultimate and purposeless surrender.*

"Not surrender," Daniels said. "A way of escaping from its imprisonment. In time, in the hundred years of which I told you, the people of my race could take that genetic code and construct another creature exactly like the first. Duplicate it with exact preciseness."

*But it still would be in stone.*

"Only one of it. The original one. That original could wait for the erosion of the rock. But the other one, its duplicate, could take up life again."

And what, Daniels wondered, if the creature in the stone did not wish for rescue? What if it had deliberately placed itself beneath the stone? What if it simply sought protection and sanctuary? Perhaps, if it wished, the creature could get out of where it was as easily as this other one—or this other thing—had risen from the mound.

*No, it cannot,* said the creature squatting on the ledge. *I was careless. I went to sleep while waiting and I slept too long.*

And that would have been a long sleep, Daniels told himself. A sleep so long that dribbling soil had mounded over it, that fallen boulders, cracked off the cliff by frost, had been buried in the soil and that a clump of birch had sprouted and grown into trees thirty feet high. There was a difference here in time rate that he could not comprehend.

But some of the rest, he told himself, he had sensed—the devoted loyalty and the mindless patience of the creature that tracked another far among the stars. He knew he was right, for the mind of that other thing, that devoted stardog perched upon the ledge, came into him and fastened on his mind and for a moment the two of them, the two minds, for all their differences, merged into a single mind in a gesture of fellowship and basic understanding, as if for the first time in what must have been millions of years this baying hound from outer space had found a creature that could understand its duty and its purpose.

"We could try to dig it out,"

said Daniels. "I had thought of that, of course, but I was afraid that it would be injured. And it would be hard to convince anyone—"

*No,* said the creature, *digging would not do. There is much you do not understand. But this other proposal that you have, that has great merit. You say you do not have the knowledge of genetics to take this action now. Have you talked to others of your kind?*

"I talked to one," said Daniels, "and he would not listen. He thought I was mad: But he was not, after all, the man I should have spoken to. In time I could talk with others but not right now. No matter how much I might want to—I can't. For they would laugh at me and I could not stand their laughter. But in a hundred years or somewhat less I could—"

*But you will not exist a hundred years,* said the faithful dog. *You are a short-lived species. Which might explain your rapid rise. All life here is short-lived and that gives evolution a chance to build intelligence. When I first came here I found but mindless entities.*

"You are right," said Daniels. "I can live no hundred years. Even from the very start, I could not live a hundred years and better than half of my life is gone. Perhaps much more than half of it. For unless I can get out of this cave I will be dead in days."

*Reach out,* said the sparkling one. *Reach out and touch me, being.*

Slowly Daniels reached out. His hand went through the sparkle and the shine and he had no sense of matter—it was as if he'd moved his hand through nothing but air.

*You see,* the creature said, *I cannot help you. There is no way for our energies to interact. I am sorry, friend.* (It was not friend, exactly, but it was good enough, and it might have been, Daniels thought, a great deal more than friend.)

"I am sorry, too," said Daniels. "I would like to live."

SILENCE fell between them, the soft and brooding silence of a snow-laden afternoon with nothing but the trees and the rock and the hidden little life to share the silence with them.

It had been for nothing, then, Daniels told himself, this meeting with a creature from another world. Unless he could somehow get off this ledge there was nothing he could do. Although why he should so concern himself with the rescue of the creature in the stone he could not understand. Surely whether he himself lived or died should be of more importance to him than that his death would foreclose any chance of help to the buried alien.

"But it may not be for nothing,"

he told the sparkling creature. "Now that you know—"

*My knowing,* said the creature, *will have no effect. There are others from the stars who would have the knowledge—but even if I could contact them they would pay no attention to me. My position is too lowly to converse with the greater ones. My only hope would be people of your kind and, if I'm not mistaken, only with yourself. For I catch the edge of thought that you are the only one who really understands. There is no other of your race who could even be aware of me.*

Daniels nodded. It was entirely true. No other human existed whose brain had been jumbled so fortunately as to have acquired the abilities he held. He was the only hope for the creature in the stone and even such hope as he represented might be very slight, for before it could be made effective he must find someone who would listen and believe. And that belief must reach across the years to a time when genetic engineering was considerably advanced beyond its present state.

*If you could manage to survive the present crisis,* said the hound from outer space, *I might bring to bear certain energies and techniques—sufficiently for the project to be carried through. But, as you must realize, I cannot supply the means to survive this crisis.*

"Someone may come along," said Daniels. "They might hear me if I yelled every now and then."

He began yelling every now and then and received no answer. His yells were muffled by the storm and it was unlikely, he knew, that there would be men abroad at a time like this. They'd be safe beside their fires.

The sparkling creature still perched upon the ledge when Daniels slumped back to rest. The other made an indefinite sort of shape that seemed much like a lopsided Christmas tree standing in the snow.

Daniels told himself not to go to sleep. He must close his eyes only for a moment, then snap them open—he must not let them stay shut for then sleep would come upon him. He should beat his arms across his chest for warmth—but his arms were heavy and did not want to work.

He felt himself sliding prone to the cave floor and fought to drive himself erect. But his will to fight was thin and the rock was comfortable. So comfortable, he thought, that he could afford a moment's rest before forcing himself erect. And the funny thing about it was that the cave floor had turned to mud and water and the sun was shining and he seemed warm again.

He rose with a start and he saw that he was standing in a wide expanse of water no deeper than his ankles, black ooze underfoot.

THERE was no cave and no hill in which the cave might be. There was simply this vast sheet of water and behind him, less than thirty feet away, the muddy beach of a tiny island—a muddy, rocky island, with smears of sickly green clinging to the rocks.

He was in another time, he knew, but not in another place. Always when he slipped through time he came to rest on exactly the same spot upon the surface of the earth that he had occupied when the change had come.

And standing there he wondered once again, as he had many times before, what strange mechanism operated to shift him bodily in space so that when he was transported to a time other than his own he did not find himself buried under, say, twenty feet of rock or soil or suspended twenty feet above the surface.

But now, he knew, was no time to think or wonder. By a strange quirk of circumstance he was no longer in the cave and it made good sense to get away from where he was as swiftly as he could. For if he stayed standing where he was he might snap back unexpectedly to his present and find himself still huddled in the cave.

He turned clumsily about, his feet tangling in the muddy bottom, and lunged toward the shore. The going was hard but he made it and went up the slimy stretch of muddy beach until he could reach the tumbled rocks and could sit and rest.

His breathing was difficult. He gulped great lungfuls and the air had a strange taste to it, not like normal air.

He sat on the rock, gasping for breath and gazed out across the sheet of water shining in the high, warm sun. Far out he caught sight of a long, humping swell and watched it coming in. When it reached the shore it washed up the muddy incline almost to his feet. Far out on the glassy surface another swell was forming.

The sheet of water was greater, he realized, than he had first imagined. This was also the first time in his wanderings through the past that he had ever come upon any large body of water. Always before he had emerged on dry land whose general contours had been recognizable—and there had always been the river flowing through the hills.

Here nothing was recognizable. This was a totally different place and there could be no question that he had been projected farther back in time than ever before—back to the day of some great epicontinental sea, back to a time, perhaps, when the atmosphere had far less oxygen than it would have in later eons. More than likely, he thought, he was very close in time to that boundary line where life for a creature such as he would be impossible. Here there apparently

was sufficient oxygen, although a man must pump more air into his lungs than he would normally. Go back a few million years and the oxygen might fall to the point where it would be insufficient. Go a little farther back and find no free oxygen at all.

Watching the beach, he saw the little things skittering back and forth, seeking refuge in spume-whitened piles of drift or popping into tiny burrows. He put his hand down on the rock on which he sat and scrubbed gently at a patch of green. It slid off the rock and clung to his flesh, smearing his palm with a slimy gellatinous mess that felt disgusting and unclean.

Here, then, was the first of life to dwell upon the land—scarcely creatures as yet, still clinging to the edge of water, afraid and unequipped to wander too far from the side of that wet and gentle mother which, from the first beginning, had nurtured life. Even the plants still clung close to the sea, existing, perhaps, only upon rocky surfaces so close to the beach that occasional spray could reach them.

Daniels found that now he did not have to gasp quite so much for breath. Plowing through the mud up to the rock had been exhausting work in an oxygen-poor atmosphere. But sitting quietly on the rock, he could get along all right.

Now that the blood had stopped pounding in his head he became aware of silence. He heard one sound only, the soft lapping of the water against the muddy beach, a lonely effect that seemed to emphasize rather than break the silence.

Never before in his life, he realized, had he heard so little sound. Back in the other worlds he had known there had been not one noise, but many, even on the quietest days. But here there was nothing to make a sound—no trees, no animals, no insects, no birds—just the water running to the far horizon and the bright sun in the sky.

For the first time in many months he knew again that sense of out-of-placeness, of not belonging, the feeling of being where he was not wanted and had no right to be, an intruder in a world that was out of bounds, not for him alone but for anything that was more complex or more sophisticated than the little skitterers on the beach.

He sat beneath the alien sun, surrounded by the alien water, watching the little things that in eons yet to come would give rise to such creatures as himself, and tried to feel some sort of kinship to the skitterers. But he could feel no kinship.

AND suddenly in this place of one-sound-only there came a throbbing, faint but clear and presently louder, pressing down against the water, beating at the

little island—a sound out of the sky.

Daniels leaped to his feet and looked up and the ship was there, plummeting down toward him. But not a ship of solid form, it seemed—rather a distorted thing, as if many planes of light (if there could be such things as planes of light) had been slapped together in a haphazard sort of way.

A throbbing came from it that set the atmosphere to howling and the planes of light kept changing shape or changing places, so that the ship, from one moment to the next, never looked the same.

It had been dropping fast to start with but now it was slowing down as it continued to fall, ponderously and with massive deliberation, straight toward the island.

Daniels found himself crouching, unable to jerk his eyes and senses away from this mass of light and thunder that came out of the sky.

The sea and mud and rock, even in the full light of the sun, were flickering with the flashing that came from the shifting of the planes of light. Watching it through eyes squinted against the flashes, Daniels saw that if the ship were to drop to the surface it would not drop upon the island, as he first had feared, but a hundred feet or so offshore.

Not more than fifty feet above the water the great ship stopped and hovered and a bright thing came from it. The object hit the water with a splash but did not go under, coming to rest upon the shallow, muddy bottom of the sea, with a bit less than half of it above the surface. It was a sphere, a bright and shiny globe against which the water lapped, and even with the thunder of the ship beating at his ears, Daniels imagined he could hear the water lapping at the sphere.

Then a voice spoke above this empty world, above the throbbing of the ship, the imagined lapping sound of water, a sad, judicial voice—although it could not have been a voice, for any voice would have been too puny to be heard. But the words were there and there was no doubt of what they said:

*Thus, according to the verdict and the sentence, you are here deported and abandoned upon this barren planet, where it is most devoutly hoped you will find the time and opportunity to contemplate your sins and especially the sin of* (and here were words and concepts Daniels could not understand, hearing them only as a blur of sound—but the sound of them, or something in the sound of them, was such as to turn his blood to ice and at the same time fill him with a disgust and a loathing such as he'd never known before). *It is regrettable, perhaps, that you are immune to death, for much as we might detest ourselves for doing it,*

*it would be a kinder course to discontinue you and would serve better than this course to exact our purpose, which is to place you beyond all possibility of ever having contact with any sort of life again. Here, beyond the farthest track of galactic intercourse, on this uncharted planet, we can only hope that our purpose will be served. And we urge upon you such self-examination that if, by some remote chance, in some unguessed time, you should be freed through ignorance or malice, you shall find it within yourself so to conduct your existence as not to meet or merit such fate again. And now, according to our law, you may speak any final words you wish.*

The voice ceased and after a while came another. And while the terminology was somewhat more involved than Daniels could grasp their idiom translated easily into human terms.

*Go screw yourself,* it said.

The throbbing deepened and the ship began to move straight up into the sky. Daniels watched it until the thunder died and the ship itself was a fading twinkle in the blue.

He rose from his crouch and stood erect, trembling and weak. Groping behind him for the rock, he found it and sat down again.

Once again the only sound was the lapping of the water on the shore. He could not hear, as he had imagined that he could, the water against the shining sphere that lay a hundred feet offshore. The sun blazed down out of the sky and glinted on the sphere and Daniels found that once again he was gasping for his breath.

Without a doubt, out there in the shallow water, on the mudbank that sloped up to the island, lay the creature in the stone. And how then had it been possible for him to be transported across the hundreds of millions of years to this one microsecond of time that held the answer to all the questions he had asked about the intelligence beneath the limestone? It could not have been sheer coincidence, for this was coincidence of too large an order ever to come about. Had he somehow, subconsciously, gained more knowledge than he had been aware of from the twinkling creature that had perched upon the ledge? For a moment, he remembered, their minds had met and mingled—at that moment had there occurred a transmission of knowledge, unrecognized, buried in some subconscious corner of himself? Or was he witnessing the operation some sort of psychic warning system set up to scare off any future intelligence that might be tempted to liberate this abandoned and marooned being?

And what about the twinkling creature? Could some hidden, unguessed good exist in the thing imprisoned in the sphere—for it to have commanded the loyalty and

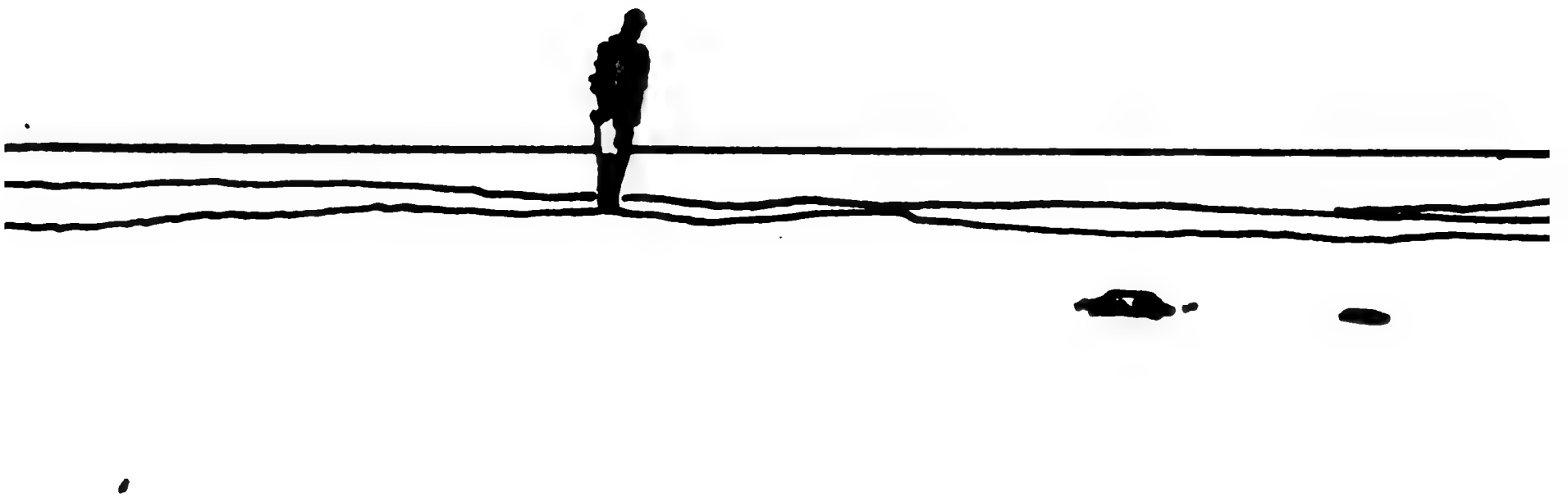
devotion of the creature on the ledge beyond the slow erosion of geologic ages? The question raised another: What were good and evil? Who was there to judge?

The evidence of the twinkling creature was, of course, no evidence at all. No human being was so utterly depraved that he could not hope to find a dog to follow him and guard him even to the death.

More to wonder at was what had happened within his own jumbled brain that could send him so unerringly to the moment of a vital happening. What more would he find in it to astonish and confound him? How far along the path to ultimate understanding might it drive him? And what was the purpose of that driving?

He sat on the rock and gasped for breath. The sea lay flat and calm beneath the blazing sun, its only motion the long swells running in to break around the sphere and on the beach. The little skittering creatures ran along the mud and he rubbed his palm against his trouser leg, trying to brush off the green and slimy scum.

He could wade out, he thought, and have a closer look at the sphere lying in the mud. But it would be a long walk in such an atmosphere and he could not chance it—for he must be nowhere near the cave up in that distant future when he popped back to his present.



Once the excitement of knowing where he was, the sense of out-of-placeness, had worn off, this tiny mud-flat island was a boring place. There was nothing but the sky and sea and the muddy beach; there was nothing much to look at. It was a place, he thought, where nothing ever happened, or was about to happen once the ship had gone away and the great event had ended. Much was going on, of course, that in future ages would spell out to quite a lot—but it was mostly happening out of sigh, down at the bottom of this shallow sea. The skittering things, he thought, and the slimy growth upon the rock were hardy, mindless pioneers of this distant day—awesome to look upon and think about but actually not too interesting.

He began drawing aimless patterns in the mud with the toe of one boot. He tried to make a tic-tac-toe layout but so much mud was clinging to his toe that it didn't quite come out.

AND then, instead of drawing in the mud, he was scraping with his toe in fallen leaves, stiff with frozen sleet and snow.

The sun was gone and the scene was dark except for a glow from something in the woods just down the hill from him. Driving sheets of snow swirled into his face and he shivered. He pulled his jacket close about him and began to but-



ton it. A man, he thought, could catch his death of cold this way, shifting as quickly as he had shifted from a steaming mudbank to the whiplash chill of a northern blizzard.

The yellow glow still persisted on the slope below him and he could hear the sound of human voices. What was going on? He was fairly certain of where he was, a hundred feet or so above the place where the cliff began—there should be no one down there; there should not be a light.

He took a slow step down the hill, then hesitated. He ought not to be going down the hill—he should be heading straight for home. The cattle would be waiting at the barnyard gate, hunched against the storm, their coats covered with ice and snow, yearning for the warmth and shelter of the barn. The pigs would not have been fed, nor the chickens either. A man owed some consideration to his livestock.

But someone was down there, someone with a lantern, almost on the lip of the cliff. If the damn fools didn't watch out, they could slip and go plunging down into a hundred feet of space. Coon hunters more than likely, although this was not the kind of night to be out hunting coon. The coons would all be denned up.

But whoever they might be, he should go down and warn them.

He was halfway to the lantern, which appeared to be setting on the ground, when someone picked it up and held it high and Daniels saw and recognized the face of the man who held it.

Daniels hurried forward.

"Sheriff, what are you doing here?"

But he had the shamed feeling that he knew, that he should have known from the moment he had seen the light.

"Who is there?" the sheriff asked, wheeling swiftly and tilting the lantern so that its rays were thrown in Daniels' direction." "Daniels," he gasped. "Good God, man, where have you been?"

"Just walking around," said Daniels weakly. The answer, he knew, was no good at all—but how could he tell anyone that he had just returned from a trip through time?

"Damn it," the sheriff said, disgusted. "We've been hunting you. Ben Adams got scared when he dropped over to your place and you weren't there. He knows how you go walking around in the woods and he was afraid something had happened to you. So he phoned me, and he and his boys began looking for you. We were afraid you had fallen or had been hurt somehow. A man wouldn't last the night in a storm like this."

"Where is Ben now?" asked Daniels.

The sheriff gestured down the hill and Daniels saw that two men,

probably Adams' sons, had a rope snubbed around a tree and that the rope extended down over the cliff.

"He's down on the rope," the sheriff said. "Having a look in the cave. He felt somehow you might be in the cave."

"He had good reason to—" Daniels started to say but he had barely begun to speak when the night was rent by a shriek of terror. The shrieking did not stop. It kept on and on. The sheriff thrust the lantern at Daniels and hurried forward.

No guts, Daniels thought. A man who could be vicious enough to set up another for death, to trap him in a cave—but who, when the chips were down, could not go through with it and had to phone the sheriff to provide a witness to his good intentions—a man like that lacked guts.

The shrieks had fallen to moaning. The sheriff hauled on the rope, helped by one of Adams' sons. A man's head and shoulders appeared above the clifftop and the sheriff reached out and hauled him to safety.

Ben Adams collapsed on the ground and never stopped his moaning. The sheriff jerked him to his feet.

"What's the matter, Ben?"

"There's something down there," Adams screamed. "There is something in the cave—"

"Something, damn it? What would it be? A cat? A panther?"

"I never seen it. I just knew that it was there. I felt it. It was crouched back inside the cave."

"How could anything be in there? Someone cut down the tree. How could anything get into the cave?"

"I don't know," howled Adams. "It might have been in there when the tree was cut. It might have been trapped in there."

One of the sons was holding Ben erect and the sheriff moved away. The other son was pulling in the rope and neatly coiling it.

"Another thing," the sheriff said, "how come you thought Daniels might be in that cave? If the tree was cut down he couldn't have climbed the tree. And he couldn't have used a rope the way you did, for there wasn't any rope. If he had used a rope it would still have been there. I don't know what's going on—damned if I do. You down messing in that cave and Daniels comes walking out of the woods. I wish someone would tell me."

Adams, who had been hobbling forward, saw Daniels for the first time and came to a sudden halt.

"Where did you come from?" he demanded. "Here we been wearing out our guts trying to hunt you down and then—"

"Oh, go on home," the sheriff said in a disgusted tone of voice. "There's a fishy smell to this. It's going to take me a little while to get it figured out."

Daniels reached out his hand to the son who had finished coiling the rope.

"I believe that's my rope," he said.

Without protest, taken by surprise, the boy handed it to him.

"We'll cut across the woods," said Ben. "Home's closer that way."

"Good night, men," the sheriff said.

Slowly the sheriff and Daniels climbed the hill.

"DANIELS," said the sheriff, "you were never out walking in this storm. If you had been you'd have had a whole lot more snow on you than shows. You look like you just stepped from a house."

"Maybe I wasn't exactly walking around," Daniels said.

"Would you mind telling me where you were? I don't mind doing my duty as I see it but I don't relish being made to look a fool while I'm doing it."

"Sheriff, I can't tell you. I'm sorry. I simply cannot tell you."

"All right, then. What about the rope?"

"It's my rope," said Daniels. "I lost it this afternoon."

"And I suppose you can't tell me about that, either."

"No, I guess I can't."

"You know," the sheriff said, "I've had a lot of trouble with Ben Adams through the years. I'd hate to think I was going to have trouble with you, too."

They climbed the hill and walked up to the house. The sheriff's car was parked out on the road.

"Would you come in?" asked Daniels. "I could find a drink."

The sheriff shook his head. "Some other time," he said. "Maybe soon. You figure there was something in that cave? Or was it just Ben's imagination? He's a flighty sort of critter."

"Maybe there wasn't anything," said Daniels, "but if Ben thought there was, what difference does it make? Thinking it might be just as real as if there were something there. All of us, sheriff, live with things walking by our sides no one else can see."

The sheriff shot a quick glance at him. "Daniels, what's with you?" he asked. "What is walking by your side or sniffing at your heels? Why did you bury yourself out here in this God-forsaken place? What is going on?"

He didn't wait for an answer. He got into his car, started it and headed down the road.

Daniels stood in the storm and watched the glowing taillights vanish in the murk of flying snow. He shook his head in bewilderment. The sheriff had asked a question and then had not waited for the answer. Perhaps because it was a question to which he did not want an answer.

*(Please turn to page 152)*

# THE ETHICS OF TRADE

TIMOTHY M. BROWN



an IF first

Apr. 18, S.D. 1125

Commissioner, Planetary Zoo
Morenull III
Sector 21

Sir:

Congratulations on your decision to purchase a specimen of the most dangerous animal in the known universe.

The Rigellian wombat is without a doubt the most powerful and deadly lifeform yet discovered by man, and as such is an addition of which any zoo may be justly proud. The ability of a wombat to attract visitors is more than ample compensation for the price of purchase, while the benefits that the biologists of your planet may derive from the availability of a live specimen are truly incalculable. In short, you have made an excellent buy.

We wish you to remember, however, that we of the Mallson Company do feel a great sense of responsibility toward our customers and their patrons. Thus it will be impossible for us to deliver your wombat until we are satisfied that your zoo has the facilities necessary for the proper care and containment of the animal. The required equipment is described in detail in the accompanying enclosures but I would like to discuss it here as well, so that you may be absolutely clear on what is needed for the safety and comfort of your specimen and your guests.

The wombat must be completely enclosed in a cage of Dorcas force fields and special care should be taken with the fields in areas where they overlap. Please note that the floor of the cage must be given the same protection as the other parts—even ten feet of reinforced concrete is no insurance of safety where wombats are concerned, as we of the Mallson Company know only too well. The precise power requirements vary from case to case but you will find minimum standards for most applications in the enclosures. These should run a few megawatts, at most.

If you wish, you may buy the generators for the Dorcas fields directly from us—already perfectly adapted for use as wombat cages—at a price other dealers cannot hope to match. Whether or not you choose to buy from us, our experts are always available for help in assembling and installing the cages. Whatever your arrangements for confining your wombat, as soon as your facilities meet the specifications which, in all good conscience, we feel obliged to set, we will rush you the animal by means of our own specially equipped transport ship.

Should you meet with difficulties anywhere in your enterprise our experts are always available for consultation. Remember that since we deal only in wombats, we

try to think of each sale as a continuing commitment and try to meet any needs our customers might have with prompt, efficient service at fees that are as low as we can make them. Please do not fail to ask us for any help you might need.

Sincerely,
C. J. Mallson
President, Mallson Wombat Company
Rigel XVIII
Sector 9

July 21, S.D. 1125

Commissioner, Planetary Zoo
Morenull III
Sector 21

Dear Sir:

I am delighted to hear that your wombat is proving to be a successful addition to the Morenull Zoo. The reports we have received so far furnish gratifying proof that there is no creature in the cosmos better able to capture the public's imagination than one of our wombats. Your response has helped to assure us that we are doing everything possible for the satisfaction of our customers.

As to your complaints about the shipping charges, we find it regrettable that the increased rates were necessary but they were forced upon us by circumstances completely outside our control. Rising operating costs and crew's wages, due mainly to the stricter provisions of the new Lifeform Transport Law, made these increases necessary. If you are in doubt as to the legality of our action please note clause 23 of your contract. We are quite within our rights on this matter. In any case, the few thousand credits involved are of little consequence when compared with the immense benefits which you are by now enjoying due to your wombat.

It has been a pleasure serving you and if there is any further aid we can supply, please let us know.

Sincerely,
C. J. Mallson

August 30, S. D. 1125

Commissioner, Planetary Zoo
Morenull III
Sector 21

Sir:

In keeping with our policy of continuing service in depth, we are happy to inform you that our research staff has completed its analysis of the available data on the recent wombat escapes on Lurda IV and Denel II. Although the data in such cases are necessarily fragmentary, the analysis does seem to indicate that the containing fields were somewhat underpowered. Our suggested power ratings have been raised accordingly (see enclosures). If you wish to modify your equip-

ment to comply with these new specifications you may buy the necessary hardware directly from us and we will be happy to send you one of our technical experts to help with the modifications. These are only two of the many services which we offer at nominal fees in order that each of our customers may display his wombat with the maximum of safety and convenience.

Ever striving to be of service, I remain,

Sincerely yours,
C. J. Mallson

September 9, S. D. 1125
Commissioner, Planetary Zoo
Morenull III
Sector 21

Sir:

Naturally I am quite distressed to hear of the escape of your wombat.

The property damage and loss of life are, of course, regrettable and I sympathize with the fact that the whole affair was made no easier to tolerate by the arrival of my last letter the day after the escape. Even so, you have no grounds on which to bring suit against the Mallson Company and if you will consult your lawyers you may see fit to withdraw this impulsive action.

In any case, we are always ready to help you with the recapture and confinement of your wombat and to that end I recommend that you enlist the aid of our expert capture team. Naturally this should be done at once, before the wombat does any more damage. Of course, the capture of a wombat on an inhabited planet is a somewhat expensive operation but I am sure you agree that the property and lives that can be saved by prompt action are much more important than mere monetary considerations. Due to the dangers involved in their work the capture team must obviously be paid in advance—but we are standing ready to dispatch them the instant we receive your check.

Good luck—and if there is anything else we can do to help you out of this difficult situation, please let us know.

Sincerely,
C. J. Mallson

P. S. Naturally I do not like to press the point at this time, but the last payment on your Dorcas field generators is overdue. I hope you will attend to this matter as soon as possible.

September 21, S. D. 1125
Commissioner, Planetary Zoo
Morenull III
Sector 21

Sir:

Perhaps I did not make sufficiently clear the dangers implicit in the continued existence of a free, unhampered wombat on an

inhabited planet. It is plain, at least, that you have not talked with the beast's caretaker or observed its behavior during feeding month—else you would not have taken so lightly the suggestion offered in my last letter.

Whether to use our capture team is, of course, up to you. But the terms of your refusal and your allegations concerning our motives were impudent and uncalled for. It is worth remembering that if the wombat's next feeding period (coming up in about two months, our records show) arrives before the animal is captured, then sending for the capture team will be very much a preliminary step. That step might best be followed by closing down all of your carpentry schools and birth-control centers, as there will be neither a housing shortage nor population pressure on your planet for some time to come. I hope I make myself perfectly clear.

As to the animal's capture, there are several methods, some safer than others. The safest, of course, is to let our professional capture team do the job for you. I cannot understand why you are so adamant in your opposition to this proposal—but if you have decided not to use all the resources at your disposal there is certainly nothing I can do about it. With reference to other methods of capture, I can only state the facts concerning a few prodecures, with most of which, to be sure, you already are acquainted.

Wombats are essentially immune to most of the weapons of the modern military short of nuclear warheads, but a sufficient concentration of conventional firepower will sometimes discourage the animal and make subsequent steps in the capture somewhat easier. Caution must be used, however, since a well-fed and well-treated wombat such as are found in zoos is often very resistant to such methods. The actual capture can sometimes be effected by sandwiching the wombat between the defensive screens of two ships of the line (Mk. IV cruisers, or heavier). I note that your planet does not maintain a navy of its own but perhaps one of your neighboring systems could be prevailed upon to help. If not, we will be happy to sell you enough trimatrocine isomer 3, the wombat tranquilizing gas, to spray an area of a hundred square kilometers. This should stop your wombat if all else fails—but please remember that this is very potent, stable and elusive stuff and as such may be expected to have quite an effect on your planet's water ecology. Be careful with it.

Your debt on the Dorcas field generators is still unpaid.

Sincerely,
C.J. Mallson

Dec. 12, S.D. 1125

Commissioner, Planetary Zoo
Morenull III
Sector 21

Sir:

You treat the Mallson Company most unfairly.

We agree that the circumstances involving your wombat have been in some ways quite unfortunate but we feel that there is no justification for your violent assaults on our integrity. Your charges that we were "negligent" and "mercenary" are, we feel, especially ill-founded and we hope that you will see fit to retract these harsh words after your temper has subsided. Be assured, however, that even if you persist in your childish efforts to have the government indict us, we will harbor no resentment and will be quite happy to settle out of court for the unpaid balance on the wombat cages which you destroyed along with the wombat.

In many ways the destruction of the wombat was the most regrettable event of all, since with a little foresight it could have been entirely avoided. We warned you to make sure that the wombat was in the area to be gassed before dropping the tranquilizer—but wombats are very tricky creatures and I suppose mistakes will happen. After that fiasco the approach of the wombat's feeding period naturally made the use of nuclear weapons your only choice. Even a zoo and a few evacuated suburbs is a small price to pay for the avoidance of a hungry wombat. But the whole affair would have been so much easier if you had called in our capture team at the beginning. The monetary cost would have been much lower and at least the animal would have been preserved.

Also, I am truly sorry that we did not foresee the effect of the tranquilizing gas on the animal life of your planet. You must understand, however, that it was a natural mistake. Those of us who deal exclusively in wombats tend to forget that there are animals besides man that drink water and are not immune to the lethal effects of the chemical. I would like to add that I am relieved to hear that the human situation is not so bad, since the water you import from Lyrantha VI is reportedly of the very highest quality.

Finally, let me remind you that we bear no grudges because of your sometimes temperamental behavior and whenever you wish to replace your wombat, remember that we are the most reliable firm in the business.

Hoping for more enjoyable business dealings in the near future, I remain,

Very sincerely yours,
C.J. Mallson
Mallson Wombat Company
Rigel XVIII
Sector 9 ●



# IN THE SILENT WORLD

**ED BRYANT**

***What color is the heart?***
***And what color the mind?***

She was nineteen, nondescript, blond, face and body still pudgy with baby fat. But she had the talent. Like no one else, she thought. I'm alone.

Words appeared on the paper under her hand: "I live in a silent world where no one can enter or love. There are no locks, doors or keys. Only an empty forest where I can walk and see the trees, cry and laugh at any cloud, taste the grass and touch the quiet wind."

Julie sighed. She took the paper into her hands and slowly ripped it, letting the pieces flutter from the desk. The hot morning and the written words and the act were typical of Julie.

But this morning the voice came, after nineteen years of silence. She had not yet heard it. She had taken her usual seat in the back row and neatly spread the spiral notebook in front of her, prepared to watch the shadows of the professor's words.

"The French symbolists," intoned the professor, displaying his easy plastic smile, "could discover a strange beauty in seemingly contradictory places. Witness, for example, Baudelaire's 'A Carrion—'"

The words rumbled meaninglessly in Julie's ears. The pen between her fingers made random scratches across the pad. Go ahead, said her mind. The bored girl let her brain reach out across the still heat of the room to pick up the thought currents beneath the professor's words.

*christ, i wish that broad in the front row would keep her legs together*

Julie drew back the probe, involuntarily pressed her knees together and felt the silky rub of her stockinged thighs. I'm blushing, she thought with chagrin, though she knew she wasn't the girl in the professor's mental image. That picture in his head . . .

Nineteen years of mental eavesdropping fell heavily on Julie. I'll never get used to the pain in their minds, she thought. So often they've driven me inside my shield. Nineteen years and Julie had never met another person with the talent she possessed. All the people of the world who talk only through their lips, she thought, and then there's me.

*hey! hey, julie*

The voice was in her head. Julie looked up, shocked.

*in my head*

The faces of her classmates were glazed in identical boredom.

*no julie i'm not in your class*

Confused, Julie sat frozen. Her pen dropped unnoticed to the floor.

*control god calm now control*

Julie concentrated, tried to think coherently.

*you you're not talking to me you're here in my mind*

*of course i'm a telepath just like you*

*no!*

"No!"

The boy beside Julie looked at her. The professor hesitated, went on with his lecture.

*no no no*

The linked, dark halls of Julie's mind echoed convulsively. Dazed with the shock of encounter, she panicked. Someone was moving slowly through the open field beside her pine forest. Stalking her.

*someone's reaching into me no get out please get out of my mind*

*calm down julie steady now just take it easy girl i'm not intruding just talking to you*

*yes yes i'm okay*

The panic faded, replaced by a chaos of confusing sensations.

*i feel like crying and laughing and screaming all at once you know*

The terror merged with an alien and gradually overpowering emotion.

Unbelieving, Julie recognized it as hope.

*please i can't control this i'm sorry god the pain my loneliness i thought i was the only one*

*i know*

Julie's thought was contrite.

*i'm sorry i was afraid can't think can't concentrate who are you how did you find me.*

*slow down one thing at a time i know it's a shock i should have been more cautious*

*shouldn't have barged in like that when i picked up that shout of yours about loneliness but i couldn't help it you're the first*

*i'm glad so happy happy*

The barrier of ice, long lodged in Julie's mind, had finally begun to melt.

*my name is ted*

Julie's mind soared.

*ted ted that's a beautiful name*

The clanging of the bell intruded. There was a shuffling of bodies as the students gathered up books, papers, pens, and herded themselves toward the door. Almost instantly Julie was alone in the classroom.

*so class is over*

Ted picked up her thought.

*what now, julie? do you want to meet me?*

*yes god, yes, yes no more loneliness please*

The pause lengthened unendurably. Then Ted answered and the key of his thought was subdued.

*no julie i hope not*

*where will i meet you*

*across the mall on the north side i'll be sitting on the steps of the liberal arts building you don't mind if i wait here and let you do the walking question i want to meet you where it's beautiful and it's just that way here*

*i don't mind it's a wonderful morning to walk now*

The next class was starting to filter into the room as Julie folded her notebook and put the ballpoint pen into her purse. Several students were already seated and a very tall boy with red hair was standing at the end of Julie's row, looking uneasy. He probably sat in the desk Julie now occupied and wasn't sure how to cope with this unexpected change in his daily routine.

Cradling her books in the crook of one arm, Julie stood and smiled at the redhead. He smiled back self-consciously and lowered his eyes. Julie suddenly caught his thought.

*what a cute girl wish she was in my class*

Julie smiled at him again as she passed and walked toward the door. Classes had almost finished changing. Julie threaded her way through late students and the others who were leisurely enjoying the spring sun as they wandered back to their dormitories.

*julie where are you from*

Ted.

*marley little town maybe a thousand people about fifty miles south of here are you from georgia too*

*no i'm afraid you've got to brand me a yankee i'm from grand rapids that's michigan*

*you don't sound like a yankee*

*and you don't sound like a southern belle it's strange how accents disappear from thoughts it's really not like words at all*

*no but i think it's ever so much better this way*

"HEY, JULIE. Wait up, honey—"

She stopped and turned. Martin, tall and bluff in striped sports shirt and immaculate white tennis shoes, smiled down.

"Come on," he said. Julie obediently started walking again and he fell into step beside her. "I want to talk to you."

"Yes?"

He looked down at her.

"I want to apologize for the other night. That was a pretty bad scene."

"Yes, it was." She didn't want to talk to Martin but she had been taught to be civil.

*ted do you mind*

*no*

"I'm not really that way at all. I guess I had a lot to drink—too much. I was a little higher than I expected to be."

Julie nodded.

"Well, I guess I wasn't really myself."

Julie looked silently down at the sidewalk.

"What I mean is," said Martin, "I want to apologize. I mean I want to make it up to you. Do you want to go out to a show and maybe have a few drinks this Saturday night?" The words rushed out. "It won't be like last time at all."

Julie looked into Martin's earn-

est face and deliberately skimmed the surface of his conscious thoughts.

*it better not be like last time this time the bitch better put out or else i'm not about to spend good cash on tickets and booze just so we can play kissy-face at the front door of her dorm*

Julie forced her lips to smile. Martin smiled back gently, affectionately.

"Go to hell," said Julie.

She reached up, slapped Martin with all the force of her body. She walked away and left him standing dumb and foolish.

Compassion and gentle laughter were in Ted's thoughts.

*good show girl but you should have kneed him right where it hurts he deserved more*

*why he's no worse than others kind words in their mouths while their minds scream hate*

*it isn't always so bad people have good thoughts now and then sometimes they think honest things occasionally they forget about selfishness and lying*

*like you*

His thought came buoyed by a vast good humor.

*i'm no candidate for sainthood but i guess i just try to treat people like i'd like to be treated it's a hokey philosophy but not a bad wish why not wish when i'm wishing i'm not at peace with myself*

His thought echoed in Julie like a litany. She recognized it and was still savoring it when the next one came.

*i've never really been at peace otherwise with myself or anybody i used to hate all of them for being what they were for not being able to touch me and i hated myself for hating*

*and now*

*i don't know*

Something fluttered against Julie's face. She opened her eyes and saw it—a yellow butterfly, bright-winged and fragile.

*ted i feel like i've always been blind and now i can see*

Julie stopped on the sidewalk, turned completely around and eagerly took into herself the lush green lawns, the beds of crimson flowers, the tan stone and ivy-covered college walls and behind them in the air, the white skyline of downtown Atlanta.

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*it's all different now ted not like it was*

She pirouetted, ecstatically thirsty, and drank the sights and sounds and smells and touches she had dimly known existed outside her.

Ted's thought came softly.

*beautiful*

Julie saw the beauty of the world and felt the vision melt with Ted's mind in a thousand subtle ways. She took this taste of him, magnified it and she imagined she was a vessel overflowing with Ted's love for life, his sensitivity, his kindness.

*easy girl careful i don't think you've ever really looked at the world you're getting drunk on reality*

Julie laughed and was silent.

*you're beautiful*

*i keep telling you i'm just a simple type with an oversimplified way of life that keeps me relatively happy*

*then i want it too*

*it's easy sometimes all you have to do is open yourself up to the world that's all*

She sensed a sharpness but disregarded it.

*i think i love you*

*slow down julie we haven't even met*

*yes we have in the most important way do you suppose our children will inherit our esp talent*

*i really hadn't thought that far ahead*

*i did the first moment i felt the loneliness start to melt*

*julie*

*yes*

*nothing*

*i'm almost there*

The mall was a broad green meadow, pentagonal, a web of paths linking the buildings at its corners. Julie crossed the center. Ahead was the pseudo-Greek architecture of the Liberal Arts Building where Ted waited.

Julie reached the steps and stopped. She looked around. Classes had long since begun again and few students were in sight. A slender Negro sat to her left, beside a stack of worn textbooks. Julie turned ahead and saw a man seated a few steps above her, an athletic type staring back at her through dark glasses.

"Ted?" she said tentatively.

*ted*

*julie over here*

"Julie."

The voice came from her left. Julie turned.

"Hello, Julie."

His voice was low, a pleasant bass. For an incredibly dilated moment Julie stared at the full lips from which the words had come, the wide dark eyes, the black skin. He spread his hands slightly.

*does it matter*

*no no of course not*

But, of course, it did. ●

**GEORGE ZEBROWSKI**
**and**
**JACK DANN**

***As a hunter he never lost his prey—merely himself!***



# TRAPS

THE continent below him was covered with lush jungle except for the sandy plateau twenty miles in diameter. A moment earlier his instruments had picked up the other ship sitting near the southern edge of the tableland. The sandy surface of the plateau was fairly regular and Rysling decided to bring his own craft down on automatic, as close to the other ship as possible. He sat back in his contour seat and waited, his senses alert. Was someone else trying to beat him to his job?

His small exploratory vessel was now three thousand feet above the plateau and coming down fast on secondary jets. The primary landside jets cut in with a roar at five hundred feet and the sleek vessel settled slowly to the sand. When all had quieted the displaced sand made a crater-like perimeter around the silver hull.

Rysling made sure the double safety on the star-drive was secure, cut in the double safety for the landside rockets. Through his forward screen he saw that the other ship and also both suns were up. The yellow star was high in the dark blue sky, near its noontime. The red giant was near the horizon, just above the green jungle which surrounded the barren plateau. Rysling released the strap from around his waist. He stood up slowly and stretched. Nothing about the other ship was moving.

As yet the planet had no name, only a number: 3-10004-2. The gravity was only slightly higher than Earth normal. The atmosphere was nearly identical in composition to Earth's. For all practical purposes the planet was ready to be colonized. But Earth Authority was picky. It wanted a complete classification of the land animals. That was why he was here, to catch the only remaining land animal that had not yet been caught, a catlike, four-footed creature which to date had eluded all efforts of hunters. That was all he had been told. He had been given a flat fee, operating expenses and a time limit of one earth month. Two weeks had already gone by.

As he came down the exit ramp, Rysling took a deep breath of the warm, humid air. After two weeks of the clean, sterile ship's air the natural variety smelled awful. He was almost sickened by the thought of micro-organisms suspended all around him. He came to the end of the ramp and the sand was gritty beneath his heavy boots. It felt good, despite the air. He noticed that he was about four hundred feet from the other ship.

HE WALKED to the other craft. The yellow sun was warm on his face. The other ship was also an exploratory model, slightly larger than his own. He estimated that it was perhaps two years older. There was a large,

slightly scarred *H* on the hull. It might be one of Henderson's ships, he thought, but the fading letter was not conclusive proof.

The ramp was down. Rsyling went halfway up the incline.

"Is anyone home?" His voice echoed in the open airlock. There was no answer. He walked into the airlock and shouted up the central passageway which led up into the control room. "Hello." Still no answer.

Rsyling climbed the ladder into the control room. He looked around at everything carefully. All seemed to be in order—shut down—except for the radar and sensor instruments. They continued their watch of the surrounding country. For the moment they had nothing to report. The light above the security switches over the star-drive and rockets glowed a bright green. Everything seemed as it should be.

*They're all probably outside. I'm sure to run into them sooner or later.*

He was almost ready to leave when his curiosity got the better of him. He sat down in the captain's station and flicked on the log tape. He listened. For a long time there was nothing. At last, very faintly, he heard heavy breathing, then a voice he didn't recognize.

"The greycat, came into my mind. Suddenly I wasn't a man any more but a beast. A hallucination? I don't know—but I'll be ready for it the next time. Going out now. Time: hell, my watch is broken . . ."

The tape ran on for a long time. Nothing more seemed to be on it. Rysling waited a little longer and switched it off. Apparently the skipper of the ship had not yet come back. He sounded like a man of imagination and easily frightened. Rysling shrugged.

He descended to the airlock, walked down the ramp, wandered to the edge of the plateau. Maybe the ship's personnel was down in the jungle. He unsnapped his binoculars and began sweeping the jungle. Some impulse made him look straight down to the base of the cliff. He saw a stretch of white sand—and then he saw the bones.

Two human skeletons lay on the sand, hands pointed to the jungle as if praying. They must have fallen to their deaths somehow.

Rysling turned up the magnification of his oculars. At once it seemed he was standing directly over the two skeletons. A bug crawled out of one of the skulls and fled across the bright sand into the underbrush. How long did it take for flesh to rot away? Later he would have to go down and try to make identifications, determine what had happened and pack the remains for shipment home.

But for now he had a job to do, an animal to net. It was the kind of odd job he often took on between his regular ship runs. A man could always do with a little extra

capital. Besides, he liked hunting. Trap a greycat, they had told him. Simple enough with the proper gear. But others had failed. Maybe Earth Authority had hired bunglers. Like the previous owners of the two skeletons below?

Their fate really didn't concern him. He would not fail.

THE "hound" was really just a cage which could open any one of its six sides, could track its prey visually and through body heat and strike more swiftly than any living thing could move. Carefully Rysling worked the remote controls and guided it out of the cargo hold and gently down to the sand. He had set up the tripod earlier. It held the screen monitor for the hound's electronic eyes. The remote control panel was just below the screen. In effect he would be the hound, seeing with its eyes and making sure that it did not tangle itself in vegetation—much of the tracking, however, was automatic and in reality he would only be needed during crucial moments, if they arose. Otherwise he could just sit in front of the monitor and live vicariously what the hound was doing. A routine job. He could not see how anyone could have failed to catch the animal. The beast didn't have a chance. The hound's eyes and heat-sensing device were tied into the ship's computers which had been programed to recognize only this type of living thing.

Rysling adjusted the controls for automatic search pattern. The pattern was based on what knowledge the computer had of the greycat. The hound lifted itself from the sand and moved slowly to the edge of the plateau. In a moment it dripped out of sight into the jungle. Rysling sat back in his seat in front of the monitor screen and stretched his legs.

In front of him now he could see wide-stemmed plants as the hound-cage pushed them aside. Some smaller plants bore large unopened buds. The tree trunks were massive, and an unfamiliar moss grew over much of their brown surface. The grass in the forest was a foot high, Rysling estimated. He could see great vines passing throught it—lines of communication between the trees. He felt as if he were the hound, a great and powerful beast moving through the jungle aisles. The heat there was oppressive and moisture fell in great drops from huge leaves. He pushed a button and the hound's eyes looked to the now hidden sky. He could only see the great trunks, standing like titans, guardians of the forest.

Rysling turned to look at the other ship. Sunlight was bright on the plateau. The yellow star was edging toward its afternoon. The red giant was partly below the horizon. Atmospheric refraction dis-

torted its equatorial region, making the huge star look misshapen and bloated. Rysling no longer believed that anyone would return to the other ship.

When he turned again to the screen the hound was motionless. Nothing moved on the monitor except for a leaf touched by the wind. Slowly, silently, the greycat walked into view, thin and muscular, body low to the ground—the eyes were yellow ovals and looked directly into the screen. Rysling was fascinated by the eyes, they beckoned him, they drew his gaze into themselves. It seemed almost as if the cat were looking directly at him, as if the green-furred beast knew that something else waited behind the hound's mechanical eyes. Rysling bit his lip. His hands hovered over the console, ready to take over in case of difficulty.

The hound moved in slowly at first, automatically—it picked up speed until it was moving about thirty miles an hour. But the greycat was suddenly a blur skimming the grass. The hound followed with deadly accuracy, changing direction with the animal. In a few moments it was directly behind the cat. Both were moving well past fifty miles and hour, Rysling estimated. The front cage door was open. Rysling noticed the red light on the console, informing him of the fact. There was a different colored light for each of the six doors. At any moment now the cat would be scooped up and the door would shut. In front of him Rysling could see the dark streak that ran from the cat's ears to the long tail.

The greycat jumped into some brush, turned and snarled at him. In a moment it would all be over, Rysling thought. Then he could go and take care of the two skeletons at the cliff base, go home to collect the rest of his fee.

The green vegetation before him was suddenly very vivid. Rysling felt a dizziness. He closed his eyes for a moment. His arms grew heavy and blood pounded in his head. When he opened his eyes the screen was out of focus and the whole world was spinning.

*He felt as if he were falling, but slowly. And the cool green grass of the forest was all around him, caressing him, inviting him to sleep until his strength returned and he could fight the strange, scentless creature that was chasing him. Rysling looked up at the hound through the greycat's eyes. It was coming toward him. He rose on his hind paws and fell back farther into the thick brush. He tried to swat the cage with his paw. He snarled and fell over backward. He jumped to all fours immediately.*

*And ran. His cat's body ran without him, instinctively, turning, jumping with an exhilarating sureness. He felt the thorn balls cling to his paws. His eyes saw everything—the forest was a rich or-*

*chestration of scents that told him all he needed to know.*

WITH a trembling hand Rysling turned off the hound's automatic program. He was shaking. Sweat had run down his back. He inhaled a tranquilizer. The hound would come back now but he would send it out again.

A hallucination, he thought. It was what the voice on the log tape of the other ship had been talking about. But he had felt pain, fatigue, tasted the pungent scents of the forest, known the sweat and muscles of the swift greycat as he knew his own. And he had known the fear of the cat, running before something it did not understand, could never understand because it was not part of the normal environment.

He thought he had part of the picture now. He had been hit by the animal's defense mechanism. Did the cat have telepathic abilities? At any rate, what he had experienced had to be an illusion and he would have to ignore it next time around. Perhaps the cat's strange power dated from some still undiscovered stage of interplanetary evolution when all life forms were still undifferentiated, all awarenesses one—the single pulse of the natural force.

The hound appeared over the edge of the plateau. It skimmed to within six feet of the control console tripod and settled to the ground. Rysling went to it and checked it carefully. Nothing was wrong. He went back to the console and sat down to face the screen. With one flick he turned the automatic track back on. Quickly the hound flew over it. When it reached the spot where it had left the cat it descended again to the jungle floor, its heat residue sensor scanning the ground for the warm trail. The greycat's path led in a wide circle toward the northern cliff wall of the plateau. The hound followed.

Apparently the animal was following the cliff wall closely. The hound picked up speed. The greycat came into view on the sand ahead. The hound picked up still more speed. The cat ran, leaving big paw prints in the sand strip that rimmed the base of the plateau.

Rysling braced himself for the hallucination. It came like a dream he could recognize as one but he could not break the spell. The cage was open and coming directly for him. The cliff wall was at his back. He had to wait for the moment when he could rush past it into the jungle. For an instant his new body was frozen, as if all its instincts were dead or confused by the precision of an enemy which made so few mistakes, gave so little opportunity to escape. The cage came on until it was directly in front of him.

It swallowed him. The bars slid

shut with a click. Then he heard the small voice whispering in his ear, *You're Rysling—this is an illusion. It will go away, change. Just wait.* But the presence of the jungle was stronger, the backdrop of his new life, the vast and vivid support for his senses, the source of all blessings. He heard it, he smelled it, he saw the vivid, achingly intense colors. Only the bars kept him from it. His own voice was very faint, very far away and of no consequence. A small fly buzzing near his ear.

The greycat threw himself at the bars. *Stupid, the button,* the voice said. *Outside the first bar.* He slid his paw between the bars and pushed wildly. The side entrance of the cage opened with a half-remembered whirring sound.

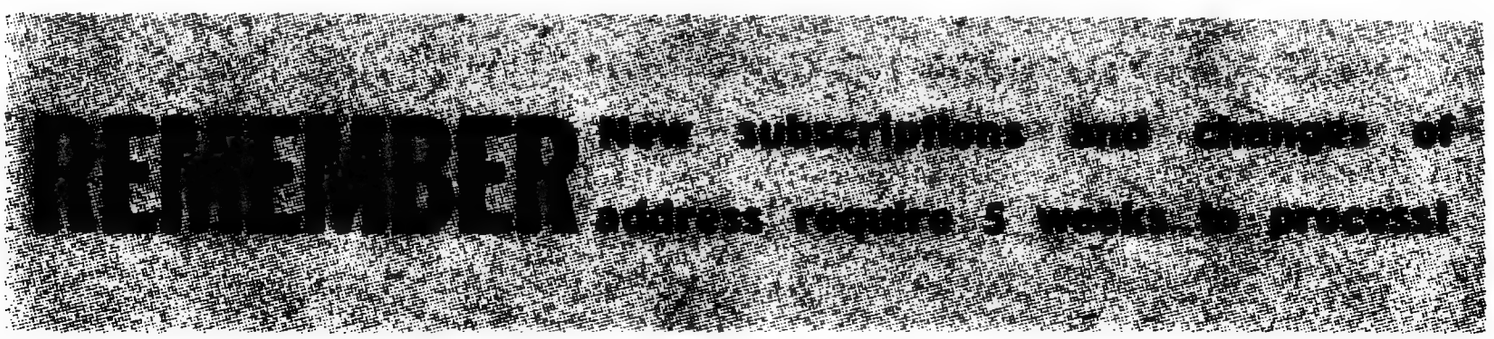
The jungle beckoned. He ran into the gloom, quietly, swiftly, in one fluid motion unlike the jerky point-to-point movement of his previous life. He could smell the shades of colors—he sensed the range which before had been only green, brown, or mud-colored. The soft voice told him to go back, regain his former self, break the spell that bound him to a world that man had turned his back on a million years ago—but the voice was a poor, sterile thing compared with the rich, surrounding forest.

Still, he would have to go back, if only for a moment. The jungle called to him—it promised confidently.

But instead he ran toward the sandy plateau.

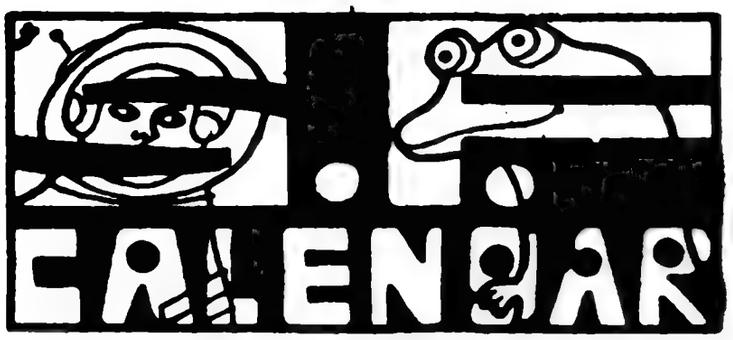
*The human form that had once been Kurt Rysling stood up from its seat in front of the tripod console. Its movements were jerky. It tried to walk and fell on all fours. The smell of the jungle it had known all its life seemed distant, faded and alien. The colors were pale and the normal sounds of the forest were gone. Its strange new limbs were weak. The greycat tried to growl but only a weak sound came out of its small, human mouth. He crawled nearer the jungle, hoping that all the normal sensations would return. He reached the edge. The urge to jump came suddenly. The greycat leaped from the plateau, its human arms stretched out in front like paws.*

The small voice still spoke in



the greycat's simple brain. Momentarily it became stronger when the cat came to the broken body of Kurt Rysling lying next to the sun-bleached skeletons at the bottom of the cliff. The red star had long since set, and the yellow sun was low over the jungle. The cat stood perfectly still in the cliff's shadow, listening. Dimly, from somewhere in the depths of the greycat's nervous system, Rysling understood what had happened to the two skeletons before him. This then was the skipper of the other ship and his companion and what was happening to him had happened to them. He looked at his own corpse with indifference. It was after all a thing and not *himself*. He felt comfortable and safe. From somewhere his old voice summoned up enough strength to tell him that while *he* could adapt easily to the cat's nervous system, the greycat had not been able to master the complexities of a human cortex. But, then, did this not mean that the human mind was only a resident of the physio-chemical brain? That in reality it was an epiphenomenon, a matrix of energy which could detach itself from its physical form? It must be so, the small voice said. After all, the iron of a magnet produces something beyond itself, the magnetic field; and the mass of a world produces a gravitational field; and the physio-chemical brain tissue produces a pattern of energies that is the real mind, responsible for all the higher functions. The small voice seemed desperate as it spoke. There would be a price to pay for his new existence—fading memories, the power of reason, love. But he didn't care. The world was vast and entirely within his grasp. It was a world for him. The smells of the forest wrapped themselves around him. Did he for a moment detect—a female odor? The image was clear: a sleek female, waiting somewhere for him. The small voice was almost gone now—he could not understand its meaning or where it had come from. He glanced again at the broken body that lay face down, its neck broken. He looked up to the edge of the plateau. Had he thought of going there? There was no way up. Swiftly he turned and ran into the green shadows. His muscles were strong. In one place the yellow sun cast its light into the jungle aisle, making his fur feel warm. Soon, he knew, it would be night. The small voice was only a background sound, no stronger than an insect's drone. He stopped and turned to look at the plateau, which from this distance was visible through a break in the trees. He could just barely see the top of one silvery ship. He looked at it, trying to remember what it was but that memory was already gone.

The greycat turned again and disappeared into the jungle. •




*March* 20-22, 1970. MARCON V. At Christopher Inn, 300 East Broad St., Columbus, Ohio. Guest-of Honor: Anne McCaffrey. Features: Panels, parties, movies, banquet. Membership: $2.00 in advance, $2.50 at the door. For information: Larry Smith, 5730F Roche Drive, Columbus, Ohio 43229.

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*March* 27-29, 1970. BOSKONE. At the Statler Hilton, Boston. For information: Anthony Lewis, 33 Unity Avenue, Belmont, Mass. 02178.

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*March* 27-29, 1970. SFCon '70. At Hilton Inn, San Francisco Airport, California. Pro Guests of Honor: Miriam Allen de Ford and E. Hoffman Price. Fan Guest of Honor: Felice Rolfe. Memberships: $3.00 now, $4.00 after January 1st, $5.00 at the door. For information: Quinn Yarbro, 369 Colusa # 5, Berkeley, Calif. 94707.

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*March* 27-30, 1969. EASTERCON. At the Royal Hotel, Southampton, England. Guest of Honor: James Blish. Panels, films, lectures and displays. Scheduled speakers: Raymond Fletcher, Member of Parliament who works closely with the Ministry of Technology; Dr. Kit Pedler, lecturer in Opthalmology and TV script writer; *et. al.* Most of the British sf writers will be in attendance. For information: SCI-CON 70, 28 Bedforbury, London, W.C. 2, England.

*April* 3-5, 1969. MINICON 3. At Hotel Dyckman, Minneapolis. Speakers: Clifford D. Simak, Gordon R. Dickson, Charles DeVet, Lin Carter. Membership: $2.00. For information: Steve Popper, 2816 Glenhurst Avenue, St. Louis Park, Minnesota 55416.

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*April* 10-12, 1970. LUNACON/ EASTERCON. At the Hotel McAlpin, Herald Square, New York City. Advance registration: $2.00. For information and registration—: Devra Langsam, 250 Crown Street, Brooklyn, New York 11225.

•

*June* 18-21, 1970. MULTICON-70. At the Skirvin Hotel, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Guests: Jim Harmon, R.A. Lafferty. Membership: $3.50. For information: David Smith, 133 Mercer Street, Ponca City, Oklahoma 74601.

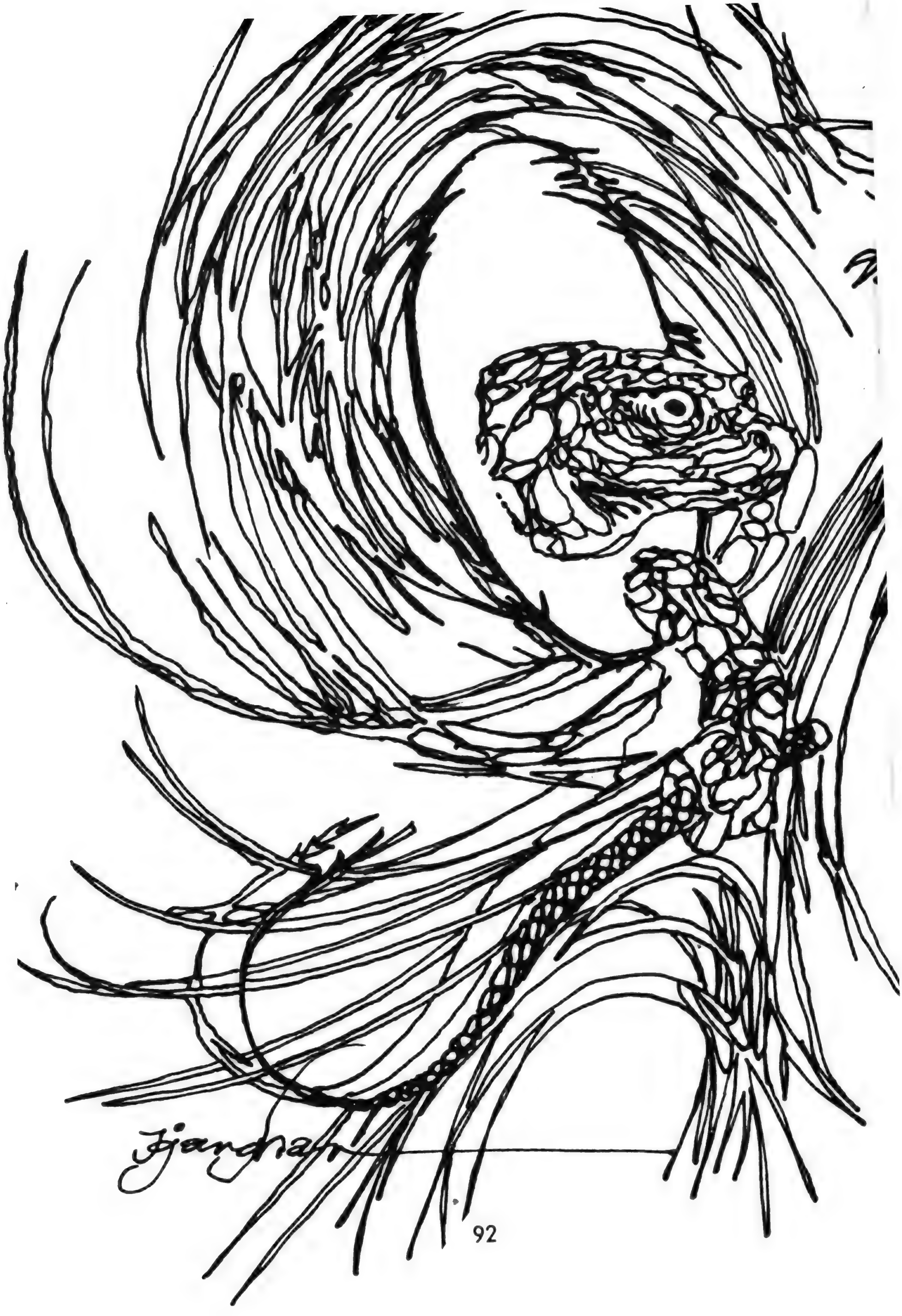
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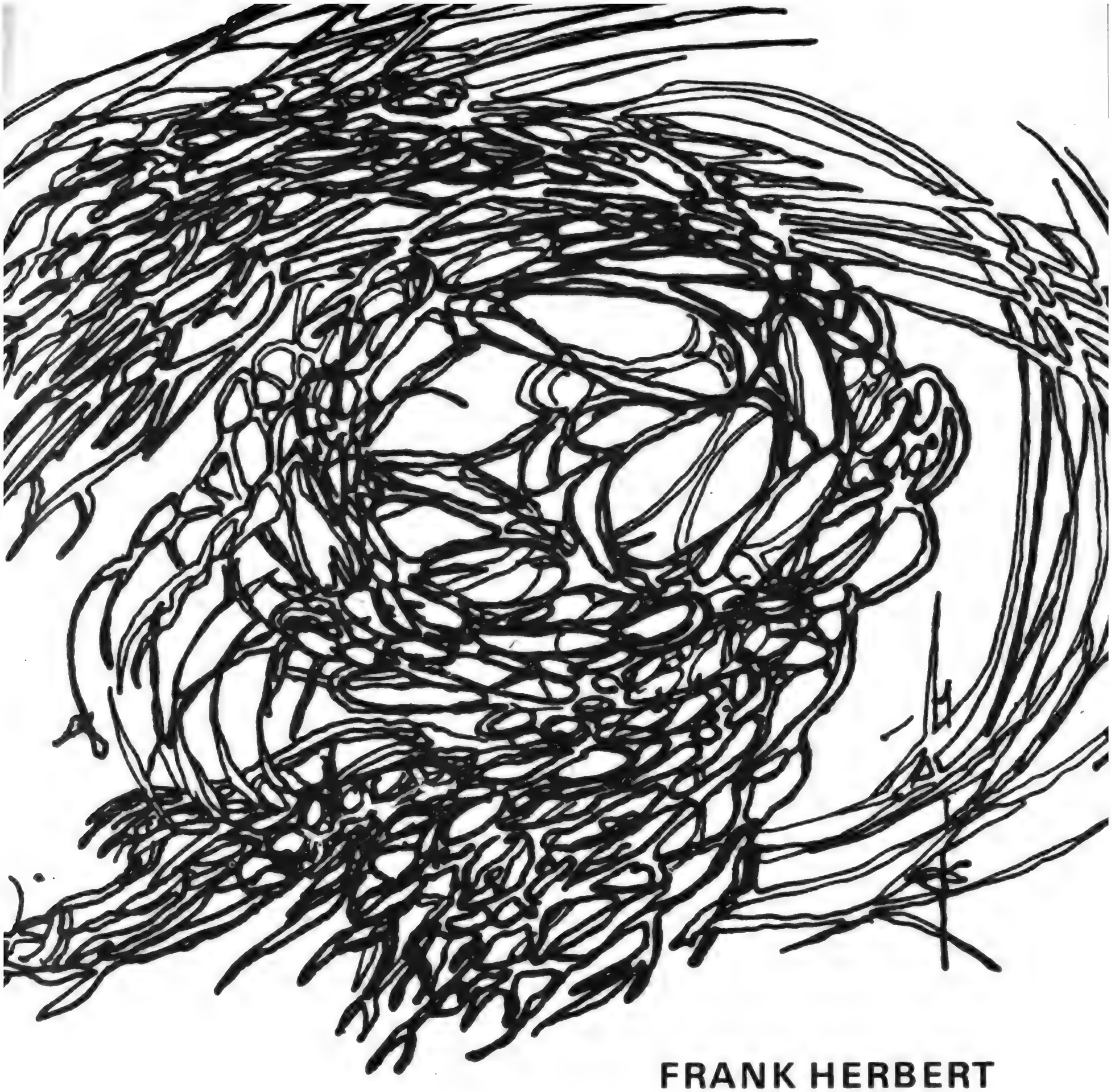
*July* 3-5, 1970. WESTERCON XXIII. Will be held in Santa Barbara, California. Guest of Honor: Jack Williamson; Fan Guest of Honor: Rick Sneary. Memberships: $3.00 through June 22; $5.00 at the door. For information: Westercon XXIII. Box 4456, Downey, California 90241.

•

*July* 17-19, 1970. PhLANGE. At the Chatham Center Motor Lodge, Center Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennslyvania. Guest-of-Honor: Harlan Ellison; GoH Emeritus: Robert Silverberg. Features: Panels, parties, movies, banquet. Membership: $2.00 in advance; $2.50 at the door. For information: Suzanne Tompkins, 5830 Bartlett Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213.

*(Please turn to page 148)*





FRANK HERBERT

# WHIPPING STAR

## PART III

## *WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE*

*Jorj X. McKie, Saboteur Extraordinary of the Bureau of Sabotage of the Confederated Sentients, is called to the planet of Cordiality on an urgent mission—a Caleban Beachball has been sighted on the planet.*

*McKie arrives on Cordiality via a jumpdoor—an instantaneous space-travel medium controlled by the mysterious Calebans—and is briefed on the emergency by fellow BuSab agent, Alicheno Furuneo. Calebans, sentient members of the Con-Sentients, have lately been disappearing, with disastrous effects on humans and other sentients around them. It is thought that Mlis Abnethe, an enormously wealthy and beautiful but unscrupulous human woman is somehow involved in the disappearances.*

*No one has ever seen a Caleban and few have successfully communicated with one. McKie forces an entry into the Beachball stranded on Cordiality and confronts the Caleban domiciled in it. He succeeds in establishing communication with the Caleban, a pure sentient, who communicates from mind to mind and tells him that Mlis Abnethe is indeed involved in the inexplicable goings on. Mlis is a flagellator, who has acquired a contractual right to have the Caleban whipped for her pleasure—in return she has promised certain educational advantages for Calebans. McKie witnesses and interrupts one of the flagellations, discovers that the Caleban, who has assumed the name Fanny Mae, has fallen in love with him.*

*McKie, a veteran of fifty-four unsuccessful marriages, is unimpressed, but utilizes the fact that the universality of love permits Fanny Mae to violate her contract with Mliss Abnethe and send him on her trail via a jumpdoor.*

*He emerges on an unfamiliar planet, talking to an uncommunicative rock.*

*He starts walking, receives an interplanetary telepathic call—actually a sniggertrance seizure—from his superiors at BuSab. One of Abnethe's whips and knives have been recovered and analyzed as being made of rawhide and steel. Both materials are anachronistic to the time of the events—their use has been discontinued long ago, and may provide a clue to Abnethe's whereabouts—McKie is to look into the matter.*

*He does—and finds himself in a strangely archaic setting, suggestive of a textbook scene from the dark ages of ancient Earth.*

*He sees black men, women and children, grass huts, primitive, two-horned beasts yoked to wagons—a scene from ancient Africa.*

*The blacks turn out to be Mliss Abnethe's subjects—he has reached her hideaway without knowing where he is in time and space. While Abnethe reaches out via a jumpdoor to murder Furuneo, who has been left to guard Fanny Mae, the blacks seize McKie and prepare to kill him.*

*With her Pan Spechi aide, Cheo, Abnethe plots the death of Fanny Mae and the end of ConSentients.*

## VII

AS FURUNEO'S life monitor ignited at his death, Taprisiots scanned the Beachball area. They found only the Caleban and four enforcers in hovering guard ships. Reasoning about actions, motives or guilt did not come within the Taprisiot scope. They merely reported the death, its location and the sentients available to their scanners.

The four enforcers came in for several days of rough questioning as a result. The Caleban was a different matter. A full BuSab management conference was required before they could decide what action to take about the Caleban. Furuneo's death had come under extremely mysterious circumstances—no head, unintelligible responses from the Caleban.

As Tuluk entered the conference room on a summons that had roused him from sleep, Siker was flailing the table. He was using his middle fighting tendril for the gesture, quite unLaclac in emotional intensity.

"We don't act without calling McKie," Siker said. "This is too delicate."

Tuluk took his position at the table, leaned into the Wreave support provided for his species, spoke mildly: "Haven't you contacted McKie yet? Furuneo was supposed to have ordered the Caleban—"

That was as far as he got. Explanations and data came at him from several of the others.

Presently, Tuluk said: "Where's Furuneo's body?"

"Enforcers are bringing it to the lab now."

"Have the police been brought in?"

"Of course."

"Anything on the missing head?"

"No sign of it."

"Has to be result of a jumpdoor," Tuluk said. "Will the police take over?"

"We're not going to allow that. One of our own."

Tuluk nodded. "I'm with Siker, then. We don't move without consulting McKie. This case was handed to him when we didn't know its extent. He's still in charge."

"Should we reconsider that decision?" someone down the table asked.

Tuluk shook his head. "Bad form," he said. "First things first. Furuneo's dead and he was supposed to have ordered McKie's return some time ago."

Bildoon, the Pan Spechi chief of the Bureau, had watched this exchange with attentive silence. He had been ego holder of his pentarchal life group for seventeen years—a reasonably average time in his species. Although the thought revolted him in a way other species could never really understand, he knew he would have to give up the ego to the youngest member of his creche circle soon. The ego exchange would come sooner than it might have without the strains of command. Terrible price to pay in the service of sentience, he thought.

The humanoid appearance his

kind had genetically adopted had a tendency to beguile other humanoids into forgetting the essentially alien character of the Pan Spechi. The time would come, though, when they would be unable to avoid alien awareness in Bildoon's case. His friends in the ConSentiency would see the creche-change at its beginning—the glazing of the eyes, the rictus of mouth.

Best not think about that, he warned himself. He needed all his abilities right now.

He felt he no longer lived in his ego-self, and this was a sensation of exquisite torture for a Pan Spechi. But the black negation of all sentient life that threatened his universe demanded the sacrifice of personal fears. The Caleban must not be allowed to die. Until he had assured himself of the Caleban's survival, he must cling to any rope life offered him, endure any terror, refuse to mourn for the almost-death-of-self that lurked in Pan Spechi nightmares. A greater death pressed upon them all.

Siker, he saw, was staring at him with an unspoken question.

Bildoon spoke three words: "Get a Taprisiot."

Someone near the door hurried to obey.

"Who was most recently in contact with McKie?" Bildoon asked.

"I believe I was," Tuluk said.

"It'll be easier for you, then," Bildoon said. "Make it short."

Tuluk wrinkled his facial slit in agreement.

A Taprisiot was led in, was helped up onto the table. It complained that they were being much too rough with its speech needles, that the imbedment was imperfect, that they had not given it sufficient time to prepare its energies.

ONLY after Bildoon invoked the emergency clause of the Bureau's special contract would it agree to act. It positioned itself in front of Tuluk

It said, "Date, time and place."

Tuluk gave the local coordinates.

"Close face," the Taprisiot ordered.

Tuluk obeyed.

"Think of contact," the Taprisiot sqeaked.

Tuluk thought of McKie.

Time passed without contact. Tuluk opened his face, stared out.

"Close face," the Taprisiot ordered.

Tuluk obeyed.

Bildoon asked, "Is something wrong?"

"Contact through Caleban change time," the Taprisiot said. "Same as before."

"Contact through a Caleban?" Bildoon ventured.

"Otherwise not available," the Taprisiot said. "McKie isolated in connectives of another being."

"I don't care how you get him, just get him," Bildoon ordered.

"Hold silence," the Taprisiot said. "Disturb imbedment." Its speech needles rustled. "Pucha, pucha," it said. "Call go when Caleban permit."

Abruptly, Tuluk jerked as the sniggertrance marked pineal ignition.

"McKie?" he said. "Tuluk here."

The words, uttered through the mumbling of the sniggertrance, were barely audible to the others around the table.

Speaking as calmly as he could, McKie said, "McKie will not be here in about thirty seconds unless you call Furuneo and have him order that Caleban to free me—"

"What's wrong?" Tuluk asked.

"I'm staked out and a Palenki is on its way to kill me. I can see it against the firelight. It's carrying what appears to be an axe. It's going to chop me up. You know how they—"

"I can't call Furuneo. He's . . ."

"Then call the Caleban!"

"You know you can't call a Caleban."

"Do it, you oaf!"

Because McKie had ordered it, suspecting that he might know such a call could be made, Tuluk broke the contact, sent a demand at the Taprisiot. It was against reason—all the data said Taprisiots could not link sentients and Calebans.

To the observers in the conference room the more obvious mumbling and chuckling of the sniggertrance faded, made a brief return, disappeared. Bildoon almost barked a question at Tuluk, hesitated. The Wreave's tubular body remained so—still.

"I wonder why the Tappy said he had to call through a Caleban?" Siker whispered.

Bildoon shook his head.

A Chither near Tuluk said, "You know, I could swear he ordered the Taprisiot to call the Caleban."

"Nonsense," Siker said.

"I don't understand it," the Chither said. "How could McKie go somewhere and not know where he is?"

"Is Tuluk out of the sniggertrance or isn't he?" Siker asked, his voice fearful. "He acts like nobody's there."

Every sentient around the table froze into silence. They all knew what Siker meant. Had the Wreave been trapped in the call? Was Tuluk gone, taken into that strange limbo from which the personality never returned?

"NOW!" someone roared.

The assembled sentients jerked back from the conference table as McKie came tumbling out of nowhere in a shower of dust and dirt. He landed flat on his back on the table directly in front of Bildoon, who lifted half out of his chair.

McKie's wrists were bloody. His eyes were glazed. His red hair was a tangled, wild mop.

"Now," McKie whispered. He turned to his side, saw Bildoon, and as though it explained everything, added: "The axe was descending."

"What axe?" Bildoon demanded, sliding back into his chair.

"The one the Palenki was aiming at my head."

"The—what?"

McKie sat up, massaged his torn wrists where the bindings had held him. Presently he shifted his ministrations to his ankles. He looked like a Gowachin frog deity.

"McKie, explain what's going on here," Bildoon ordered.

"I—ahhh—well, the nick of

time was almost a fatal nick too late," McKie said. "What made Furuneo wait so long? He was told six hours, no more. Wasn't he?"

McKie looked at Tuluk, who remained silent, stiff as a length of gray pipe against the Wreave support.

"Furuneo's dead," Bildoon said.

"Damn," McKie said softly. "How?"

Bildoon made the explanation brief, then asked, "Where've you been? What's this about a Palenki with an axe?"

McKie, still sitting on the table, gave a neatly abbreviated, chronological report. It sounded as though he were talking about a third person.

He wound it up with a flat statement: "I have no idea at all where I was."

"They were going to—chop you up?" Bildoon asked.

"The axe was coming down," McKie said. "It was right there." He held up a hand about six centimeters from his nose."

Siker cleared his throat, said, "Something's wrong with Tuluk."

They all turned.

TULUK remained propped against the support, his face slit closed. His body was there but he was not.

"Is he—lost?" Bildoon rasped and turned away.

If Tuluk failed to come back—how like the Pan Spechi ego loss that would be!

"Somebody down there shake up that Taprisiot," McKie ordered.

"Why bother?" That was a human male from the legal department. "They never answer a direct question about—you know." He glanced uneasily at Bildoon, who remained with face averted.

"Tuluk made contact with the Caleban," McKie said, remembering. "I told him—it's the only way he could have done it with Furuneo dead."

He stood up on the table, walked down its length to stand towering over the Taprisiot.

"You!" he shouted. "Taprisiot!"

Silence.

McKie drew a finger along an arm of speech needles. They clattered like a line of wooden clackers but no intelligible sound came from the Taprisiot.

"You're not supposed to touch them," someone said.

"Get another Taprisiot in here," McKie ordered.

Someone ran to obey.

McKie mopped his forehead. He required all his reserves to keep from trembling. During the descent of the Palenki axe he had said goodbye to the universe. It had been final, irrevocable. He still felt that he had not returned, that he was watching the antics of some other creature in his own flesh, a familiar creature—but a stranger, really. This room, the words and actions around him, were some sort of distorted play refined to blind sterility. In the instant when he had accepted his own death he had realized there still remained uncounted experiences he wanted to live through. This room and his duties as a BuSab agent had not

been among those experiences. The old reality was drowned in selfish memories. Still, this flesh went through the motions. That was what training did.

A second Taprisiot was herded into the room, its needles squeaking complaints. It was hoisted onto the table, objecting all the way.

"You have Taprisiot! Why you disturb?"

Bildoon turned back to the table, studied the scene but remained silent, withdrawn. No one had ever been brought back from the long-distance trap.

McKie faced the new Taprisiot. "Can you contact this other Taprisiot?" he demanded.

"Pucha, pucha—" the second Taprisiot began.

"I'm sincere."

"Ahseeda day-day," the second Taprisiot squeaked.

"I'll stack you with somebody's firewood if you don't get cracking," McKie snarled. "Can you make contact?"

"Who you call?" the second Taprisiot asked.

"Not me, you fugitive from a sawmill!" McKie roared. "Them." He pointed at Tuluk and the first Taprisiot.

"They stuck to Caleban," the second Taprisiot said. "Who you call?"

"What do you mean, stuck?" McKie demanded.

"Tangled?" the Taprisiot ventured.

"Can either of them be called?" McKie asked.

"Untangle soon, then call," the Taprisiot said.

"Look," Siker said.

McKie whirled.

Tuluk was flexing his facial slit. A mandibular extensor came out, withdrew.

McKie held his breath.

Tuluk's facial slit opened wide and he said, "Fascinating."

"Tuluk?" McKie said.

The slit widened. Wreave eyes stared out.

"Yes?" Then: "Ah, McKie. You made it."

"You call now?" the second Taprisiot asked.

"Get rid of him," McKie ordered.

Squeaking protests—"If you not call, why disturb?"—the Taprisiot was removed from the room.

"What happened to you, Tuluk?" McKie asked.

"Difficult to explain," the Wreave said.

"Try."

"Imbedment," Tuluk said. "That has something to do with planetary conjunctions, whether the points linked by a call are aligned with each other across open space. There was some problem with this call, discontinuous through a stellar mass, perhaps. And it was contact with a Caleban—I don't appear to have the proper words."

"Do you understand what happened to you?"

"I think so. You know, I hadn't realized where I lived."

McKie stared at him, puzzled. "What?"

"Something's wrong here," Tuluk said. "Oh, yes—Furuneo."

"You said something about

where you lived," McKie prodded.

"Space occupancy, yes," Tuluk said. "I live in a place with many—ah—synonymous? Yes, synonymous occupants."

"What are you talking about?"

"I was actually in contact with the Caleban during my call to you," Tuluk said. "Very odd, McKie. It was as though my call went through a pinhole in a black curtain and the pinhole was the Caleban."

"So you contacted the Caleban," McKie prompted.

"Oh, yes. Indeed I did." Tuluk's mandibular extensors moved in a pattern indicative of emotional disturbance. "I saw! That's it. I saw—ah—many frames of parallel films. Of course, I didn't really see them. It was the eye."

"Eye? Whose eye?"

"That's the pinhole," Tuluk explained. "It's our eye, too, naturally."

"Do you understand any of this, McKie?" Bildoon asked.

"My impression is he's talking like a Caleban," McKie said. He shrugged. "Contaminated, perhaps. Entangled?"

"I suspect," Bildoon said, "that Caleban communication can be understood only by the certifiably insane."

MCKIE wiped perspiration from his lip. He felt he could almost understand what Tuluk had said. Meaning hovered right at the edge of awareness.

"Tuluk," Bildoon said, "try to tell us what happened to you. We don't understand you."

"I am trying."

"Keep at it," McKie said.

"You contacted the Caleban," Bildoon said. "How was that done? We've been told it's impossible."

"It was partly because the Caleban seemed to be handling my call to McKie," Tuluk said. "Then—McKie ordered me to call the Caleban. Perhaps it heard."

Tuluk closed his eyes, appeared lost in reverie.

"Go on," Bildoon said.

"I—it was—" Tuluk shook his head, opened his eyes, stared pleadingly around the room. He met curious, probing eyes on all sides. "Imagine two spiderwebs," he said. "Natural spiderwebs, now, not the kind they spin at our command—random products. Imagine that they must—contact each other—a certain congruity between them, an occlusion."

"Like a dental occlusion?" McKie asked.

"Perhaps. At any rate, this necessary congruity, this shape required for contact, presumes upon proper connectives."

McKie expelled a harsh breath. "What the devil are connectives?"

"I go now?" the first Taprisiot interrupted.

"Damn," McKie said. "Somebody get rid of this thing."

The Taprisiot was hustled from the room.

"Tuluk, what are connectives?" McKie demanded.

"Is this important?" Bildoon asked.

"Will you all take my word for it and let him answer?" McKie

asked. "It's important, believe me. Tuluk?"

Tuluk said, "You realize, of course, that artificiality can be refined to the point where it's virtually indistinguishable from original reality?"

"What's that have to do with connectives?"

"It's precisely at that point where the single distinguishing characteristic between original and artificial is the connective."

"Huh?" McKie said.

"Look at me," Tuluk said.

"I am looking at you."

"Imagine that you take a food vat and produce in it an exact fleshly duplicate of my person," Tuluk said.

"An exact fleshly—"

"You could do it, couldn't you?" Tuluk demanded.

"Of course. But why?"

"Just imagine it. Don't question. An exact duplicate down to and including the cellular message units. This flesh would be imbued with all my memories and responses. Ask it a question you might ask of me and it would answer as I might answer. Even my mates wouldn't be able to distinguish between us."

"So," McKie said.

"Would there be any difference between us?" Tuluk asked.

"But you said—"

"There would be one difference, wouldn't there?"

"The time element, the—"

"More than that," Tuluk said. "One would know it was a copy. Now, that chairdog in which Ser Bildoon sits is a different matter, not so?"

"Huh?"

"It's an unthinking animal," Tuluk said.

McKie stared at the chairdog Tuluk had indicated. It was a product of genetic shaping, gene surgery and selection. What possible difference could it make that the chairdog was an animal—however remotely descended?

"What does the chairdog eat?" Tuluk asked.

"The food tailored for it, what else?" McKie turned back to the Wreave, studied him.

"But neither the chairdog nor its food are the same as their ancestral flesh," Tuluk said. "The vat food is an endless, serial chain of protein. The chairdog is flesh which is ecstatic in its work."

"Of course. That's the way it was made." McKie's eyes went wide. He began to see what Tuluk was explaining.

"The differences, these are the connectives," Tuluk said.

"McKie, do you understand this gibberish?" Bildoon demanded.

McKie's throat was dry. "The Caleban sees only these—refined differences?" he asked.

"And nothing else," Tuluk said.

"Then it doesn't see us as shapes or dimensions or—"

"Or even as extensions in time as we understand time," Tuluk said. "We are, perhaps, nodes on a standing wave. Time, for the Caleban, isn't something squeezed out of a tube. It's more like a line which your senses intersect."

McKie breathed deeply.

"I don't see where this helps us

one bit," Bildoon said. "Our major problem is to find Abnethe. Do you have any idea, McKie, where that Caleban sent you?"

"I saw the night constellations overhead," McKie said. "Before I leave we'll get a mindcord on what I saw and have a computer check on the star patterns."

"Provided the pattern's in the Master Registry," Bildoon said.

"What about that slave culture McKie stumbled on?" one of the Legal staff asked. "We could ask for a . . ."

"Haven't any of you been listening?" McKie asked. "Our problem is to find Abnethe. I thought we had her, but I'm beginning to think this may not be that easy. Where is she? How can we go into a court and say 'At some unknown place in an unknown galaxy, a female believed to be Mliss Abnethe, but whom I didn't really see, is alleged to be conducting . . .'"

"Then what do we do?" the Legal staffer growled.

"With Furuneo dead, who's watching Fanny Mae?" McKie asked.

"We have four enforcers watching inside—where she is," Bildoon said. "And four outside, watching them. Are you sure you've no other clue to where you were?"

"None."

"A complaint by McKie would fail now." Bildoon said. "No—a better move might be to charge her with harboring a—" he shuddered—"Pan Spechi fugitive."

"Do we know who that fugitive is?" McKie asked.

"Not yet. We haven't decided the proper course yet. I'm leaving that up to legal." He glanced at a Legal Department representative, a human female seated near Tuluk. "Hanaman?"

Hanaman cleared her throat. She was a fragile woman, thick head of brown hair in gentle waves, a long oval face with soft blue eyes, delicate nose and chin, a wide full mouth.

"You think it advisable to discuss this in Council now?" she asked.

"I do or I wouldn't have called on you," Bildoon said.

FOR an instant McKie thought the reproof might bring real tears to Hanaman's eyes. Then he saw the controlled, measuring stare she swept around the conference room. She had brains, he saw, and knew there were those here susceptible to her sex.

"McKie," she said, "is it necessary for you to stand on the table? You're not a Taprisiot."

"Thanks for reminding me," he said. He jumped down, found a chairdog opposite her, stared back at her with a bland intensity.

Presently she focused on Bildoon, said, "To bring everyone up to date, Abnethe with one Palenki tried to flog the Caleban about two hours ago. Acting on our orders, an enforcer prevented the flogging. He cut off the Palenki's arm with a raygen. As a result, Abnethe's legal staff already is seeking an injunction."

"Then they were prepared ahead of time," McKie said.

"Obviously," she agreed. "They're alleging outlaw sabotage, misfeasance by a bureau, mayhem, misconduct, malicious mischief, felonious misprision—"

"Misfeasance?" McKie demanded.

"This is a robo-legum case, not a Gowachin jurisdiction," Hanaman said. "We don't have to exonerate the prosecutor before entering the—" She broke off, shrugged. "Well, you know all that. BuSab is being held to answer for collective responsibility in the consequences of unlawful and wrongful acts committed by its agents in pursuance of the authority permitted them—"

"Wait a minute," McKie interrupted. "This is bolder than I expected from that crowd."

"—and they charge," Hanaman went on, "that the Bureau is guilty of a felony by criminal neglect in failure to prevent a felony from being committed and not bringing to justice the offender after such commission."

"Have they named names or is it all John Does?" McKie asked.

"No names."

"If they're this bold, they're desperate," McKie said. "Why?"

"They know we aren't going to sit idly by and allow our people to be killed," Bildoon said. "They know we have copies of the contract with the Caleban and that it gives Abnethe control of the Caleban's jumpdoor. No one else could have been responsible for Furuneo's death and the perpetrator—"

"No one except the Caleban," McKie said.

A profound silence settled over the room.

Presently Tuluk said, "You don't seriously believe—"

"No, I don't," McKie said. "But I couldn't prove my belief to a robo-legum court. This does present an interesting possibility, though."

"Furuneo's head," Bildoon said.

"Correct," McKie said. "We demand Furuneo's head."

"What if they contend the Caleban sequestered the head?" Hanaman asked.

"I don't intend asking them for it," McKie said. "I'm going to ask the Caleban."

Hanaman nodded, her gaze intent on McKie with a light of admiration in her eyes.

"Clever," she breathed. "If they attempt to interfere—they're guilty. But if we get the head—"

She looked at Tuluk.

"What about it, Tuluk?" Bildoon asked. "Think you could get anything from Furuneo's brain?"

"That depends on how much time has passed between the death and our key-in," Tuluk said. "Nerve replay has limits, you know."

"We know," Bildoon said.

"Yeah," McKie said. "Only one thing for me to do now, isn't there?"

"Looks that way," Bildoon said.

"Will you call off the enforcers or shall I?" McKie asked.

"Now, wait a minute," Bildoon said. "I know you have to go back to that Beachball but—"

"Alone," McKie said.

"Why?"

"I can give the demand for Furuneo's head in front of witnesses," McKie said, "but that's not enough. They want me. I got away from them and they've no idea how much I know about their hidey hole."

"Exactly what do you know?" Bildoon asked.

"We've already been through that," McKie said.

"So you now see yourself as bait?"

"I wouldn't put it exactly that way," McKie said. "But if I'm alone they might try bargaining with me. They might even—"

"They might even shorten you!" Bildoon snarled.

"You don't think it's worth the try?" McKie asked. He stared around the room at the attentive faces.

Hanaman cleared her throat. "I see a way out of this."

Everyone looked at her.

"We could put McKie under Taprisiot surveillance," she said.

"He's a ready-made victim if he's sitting there in a snigger-trance," Tuluk said.

"Not if the Taprisiot contacts are minimal every few seconds."

"And as long as I'm not yelling for help the Tappy breaks off," McKie said. "Good."

"I don't like it," Bildoon said. "What if—"

"You think they'll talk openly to me if they see the place full of enforcers? McKie asked.

"No, but if we can prevent—"

"We can't and you know it."

Bildoon glared at him but did not speak.

"We must have those contacts between McKie and Abnethe if we're going to try cross-charting to locate her position," Tuluk said.

Bildoon stared at the table in front of him.

"That Beachball has a fixed position on Cordiality," McKie argued. "Cordiality has a known planetary period. At the instant of each contact the Ball will be pointing at a position in space—a line of least resistance for the contact. Enough contacts will describe a cone with—"

"—with Abnethe somewhere in it," Bildoon supplied, looking up. "Provided you're right about this thing."

"The call connectives have to seek their conjunction through open space," Tuluk said. "There must be no large stellar masses between call points, no hydrogen clouds of any serious dimensions, no groups of large planetary—"

"I understand the theory," Bildoon said. "But there's no theory needed about what they can do to McKie. It'd take them less than two seconds to slip a jumpdoor over his neck and—"

He drew a finger across his throat.

"So you have the Tappy contact me every two seconds," McKie said. "Work it in relays. Get a string of agents in—"

"And what if they don't try to contact you?" Bildoon thoughtfully asked.

"Then we'll have to sabotage them," McKie said.

## VIII

WHEN you came right down to it, McKie decided, this Beachball wasn't as weird a home as some he'd seen. It was hot, yes, but that fitted a peculiar requirement of the occupant. Sentients existed in hotter climates. The giant spoon where the Caleban's unpresence could be detected—well, that could be equated with a divan. Wall handles, spools there, lights and whatnot—all those were almost conventional in appearance, although McKie seriously doubted he could understand their functions. The automated homes of Breedywie, though, displayed more outlandish control consoles.

The ceiling here was a bit low but he could stand without stooping. The purple gloom was no stranger than the variglare of Gowachin where most offworld sentients had to wear protective goggles while visiting friends. The Beachball's floor covering did not appear to be a conventional living organism, but it was soft. Right now it smelled of a standard pyrocene cleaner-disinfectant and the fumes were rather stifling in the heat.

McKie shook his head. The fly-buzz *zzzzt* of Taprisiot contact every two seconds was annoying but he found he could override the distraction.

*Your friend reached ultimate discontinuity,* the Caleban had explained. *His substance has been removed.*

For *substance*, read *blood-and-body*, McKie translated. He hoped the translation achieved some degree of accuracy but he cautioned himself not to be too sure of that.

*If we could only have a little air current in here,* McKie thought. *Just a small breeze . . .*

He mopped perspiration from his forehead, drank from one of the water jugs he'd provided for himself.

"You still there, Fanny Mae?"

*You observe my presence?*

"Almost."

*That is our mutual problem—seeing each other,* the Caleban said.

"You're using time-ordinal verbs with more confidence, I note."

*I get the hang of them, yes?*

"I hope so."

*I date the verb as a nodal position.*

"I don't believe I want that explained."

*Very well—I comply.*

"I'd like to try again to understand how the floggings are timed."

*When shapes reach proper proportion.*

"You already said that. What shapes?"

*Already? That signifies earlier?*

"Earlier," McKie said. "That's right. You said that about shapes before."

*Earlier and before and already. Yes—times of different conjunction by linear alteration of intersecting connectives.*

Time, for the Caleban, was a position on a line, McKie reminded himself, recalling Tuluk's attempt at explanation. He had to

look for the subtly refined differences—they were all this creature saw.

"What shapes?" McKie repeated.

*Shapes defined by duration lines. I see many duration lines. You, oddly, carry visual sensation of one line only. Very strange. Other teachers explain this to self but understanding fails—extreme constriction. Self admires molecular acceleration but—maintenance exchange confuses.*

Confuses!

"What molecular acceleration?"

*Teachers define molecule as smallest characteristic unit of element or compound. True?*

"That's right."

*This carries difficulty in understanding unless ascribed by self to perceptive difference between our species. Say, instead, molecule perhaps equals smallest physical unit visible to species. True?*

What was the difference? It was all gibberish. How had they gotten off onto molecules and acceleration from the proper proportion of undefined shapes?

"Why acceleration?"

*Acceleration always occurs along convergence lines we use while speaking, one to another.*

Oh, damn! McKie lifted a water jug, drank, choked on a swallow. He bent forward, gasping.

When he could manage it he said, "The heat in here—molecular speedup?"

*Do these concepts not interchange?* the Caleban asked.

"Never mind that," McKie blurted, still spitting water. "When you speak to me—is that what accelerates the molecules?"

*Self assumes this true condition.*

McKie put down the water jug carefully, capped it. He began to laugh.

*Not understand these terms,* the Caleban objected.

McKie shook his head. The Caleban's words still came at him with that non-speech quality but he detected definite querulous notes—overtones. Accents? He gave it up. There was something, though.

*Not understand,* the Caleban insisted.

This made McKie laugh all the harder.

"Oh, my," he gasped when he could catch his breath. "The ancient wheeze was right all along and nobody knew it. Oh, my. Talk is just hot air—"

Again laughter convulsed him.

Presently he lay back, inhaled deeply. In a moment, he sat up, took another swallow of water, capped the jug.

*Teach,* the Caleban commanded. *Explain these unusual terms.*

"Terms? Oh—certainly. Laughter. It's our common response to nonfatal surprise. No other significant communicative content."

Laughter. *Other nodal encounters with term noted.*

"Other nodal—" McKie broke off. "You've heard the word before, you mean?"

*Before. Yes. I—self—I attempt understanding of term, laughter. We explore meaning now?*

"Let's not."

*Negative reply?*

"That's correct—negative. I'm

much more curious about what you said about—maintenance exchange. That was what you said, wasn't it? Maintenance exchange confuses?"

*I attempt define position for you odd one-tracks.*

"One-tracks, that's how you think of us, eh?"

McKie felt suddenly small and inadequate.

*Relationship of connectives, one to many, many to one,* the Caleban said. *Maintenance exchange.*

"How in the hell did we get into this deadend conversation?"

*You seek positional referrents for placement of floggings, that begins conversation.*

"Placement—yeah."

*You understand S' eye effect?*

MCKIE exhaled slowly. To the best of his knowledge no Caleban had ever before volunteered a discussion of the S'eye effect. The one-two-three of how to use the mechanism of the jumpdoors—yes, this was something they could (and did) explain. But not the theory.

"I—uh—use the jumpdoors," McKie said. "I know something of how the control mechanism is assembled and tuned to—"

*Mechanism not coincide with effect!*

"Uhhh, certainly," McKie agreed. "The word's not the thing."

*Precisement! We say—I translate, you understand? We say, 'Term evades node.' You catch the hanging of this term, self thinks.*

"I—uh—get the hang of it," McKie agreed.

*Recommend hang-line as good thought. Self, I believe we approach true communication. It wonders me.*

"You wonder about it," McKie corrected.

*Negative. It wonders about me.*

"That's great," McKie said in a flat voice. "That's communication?"

*Understanding diffuses—scatters? Yes—understanding scatters when we discuss connectives. I observe connectives of your—psyche. For psyche, I understand 'other self.' True?*

"Why not?"

*I see*—the Caleban ignored McKie's defeated tone—*psyche patterns, perhaps their colors. Approachments and outreachings touch my awareness. I come, through this, to unwinding of intelligence and perhaps understand what you mean by term—stellar mass. Self understands by being stellar mass, you hang this, McKie?*

"Hang this? Oh, sure—sure."

*Good. Comes now an understanding of your—wanderings? Difficult word, McKie. Very likely this an uncertain exchange. Wandering equals movement along one line for you. This cannot exist for us. One moves, all move for Caleban on own plane. S'eye effect combines all movements and vision. I see you to other place of your desired wandering.*

McKie, his interest renewed by this odd rambling, said, "You see us—that's what moves us from one place to another?"

*I hear sentient of your plane say sameness, McKie. Sentient say, 'I*



*will see you to the door.' So? Seeing moves.*

*Seeing moves?* McKie wondered. He mopped his forehead, his lips. The Beachball was so damned hot. What did all this have to do with maintenance exchange? Whatever that was.

*Stellar mass maintains and exchanges,* the Caleban said. *Not see through, the self. S'eye connective discontinues. You call this—privacy? Cannot say. This Caleban exists alone of self on your plane. Lonely.*

*We're all lonely,* McKie thought.

He put down a surge of irritation at the *zzzzt*-beat of the Taprisiot intrusions. That, at least, was companionship.

"Do Taprisiots send our messages across space the same way?" he asked. "Do they see the calls?"

*Taprisiot very weak. Taprisiot not possess Caleban energy. Self energy, you understand?*

"I dunno. Maybe."

*Taprisiot see very thin, very short. Taprisiot not see through stellar mass of self. Sometimes Taprisiot ask for—boost? Amplification. Caleban provide service. Maintenance exchange, you hang? Taprisiot pay, we pay, you pay. All pay energy. You call energy demand—hunger, not so?*

"Oh, hell," McKie said. "I'm not getting the half of—"

A BRAWNY Palenki arm carrying a whip inserted itself into the space above the giant spoon. The whip cracked, sent a geyser of green sparks into the purple gloom. Arm and whip were gone before McKie could move.

"Fanny Mae," McKie whispered, "you still there?"

Silence—then: *No laughter, McKie. Thing you call surprise—but no laughter. I break line there. An abruptness, that flogging.*

McKie exhaled, noted the mind-clock timing of the incident, relayed the coordinates at the next Taprisiot contact.

There was no sense talking about pain, he thought. It was equally fruitless to explore inhaling whips or exhaling substance—or maintenance exchanges or hunger or stellar masses or Calebans moving other sentients by the energy of seeing. Communication was bogged down.

He and Fanny Mae had achieved something, though. Tuluk had been right. The S'eye contacts for the floggings required some timing or periodicity that could be identified. Perhaps there was a line-of-sight involved. One thing sure: Abnethe had her feet planted on a real planet somewhere. She and her mob of psycho friends—her psycho-phants!—all had a position in space which could be located. She had Palenkis, renegade Wreaves, an outlaw Pan Spechi—gods knew what all. She had Beautybarbers, too, and Taprisiots and this Caleban all used the same sort of energy to do their work.

"Could we try again," McKie asked, "to locate Abnethe's planet?"

*Contract forbids.*

"You have to honor it, eh? Even to the death?"

*Honor to ultimate discontinuity, yes.*

"And that's pretty near, is it?"

*Position of ultimate discontinuity becomes visible to self*, the Caleban said. *Perhaps this equates with near.*

Again arm and whip flicked into being, showered the air with a cascade of green sparks and withdrew.

McKie darted forward, stopped beside the spoon bowl. He had never before ventured quite this close to the Caleban. There was more heat near the bowl and he felt a tingling sensation along his arms. The shower of green sparks had left no mark on the carpeting, no residual substance, nothing. McKie felt the insistent attraction of the Caleban's unpresence, a disturbing intensity this near. He forced himself to turn away. His palms were wet with fear.

What else was he afraid of here?

"Those two attacks came pretty close together," McKie said.

*Positional adjacency noted. Next coherence more distant. You say 'farther away?' True?*

"Yeah. Will the next flogging be your last?"

*Self not know*, the Caleban said. *Your presence lessens flogging intensity. You—reject? Ahhh, repel!*

"No doubt," McKie said. "I wish I knew why the end of you means the end of everyone else."

*You transfer self of you with S'eye*, the Caleban said. *So?*

"Everyone does."

*Why? You teach of explanation this?*

"It's centralizing the whole damn universe. It's—it's created the specialized planets—honeymoon planets, gynecology planets, pediatrics planets, snow-sport planets, geriatrics planets, swim-sport planets, library planets—even BuSab had almost a whole planet to itself. Nobody gets by without it any more. Last figures I saw, fewer than a fraction of one per cent of the sentiment population had never used a S'eye jumpdoor."

*Truth. Such use creates connectives, McKie. You must hang this. Connectives must shatter with my discontinuity. Shatter conveys ultimate discontinuity for all who use jumpdoor S'eye.*

"If you say so. I still don't understand."

*It occurs, McKie, because my fellows choose me for—coordinator? Inadequate term. Funnel? Handler, perhaps. No, still inadequate. Ahhh! I, self of I, am S'eye!*

McKie backed away, retreating from such a wave of sadness that he felt he could not contain it. He wanted to scream in protest. Tears flowed down his cheeks unbidden. A sob choked him. Sadness! His body was reacting to it but the emotion came from outside himself.

Slowly it faded.

McKie blew air soundlessly through his lips. He still trembled from the passage of that emotion. It had been the Caleban's emotion, he realized. But it came out like the waves of heat in this room,

swept over and immersed every nerve receptor in its path.

Sadness.

Responsibility for all those impending deaths, no doubt.

*I am S'eye!*

WHAT in the name of all the devils in the universe could the Caleban mean by such a strange claim? He thought of each jumpdoor passage. Connectives? Threads, perhaps. Each being caught by the S'eye effect trailed threads of himself through the jumpdoors. Was that it? Fanny Mae had used the word 'funnel.' Every traveler went through her—hands? Whatever. And when she ceased to exist the threads broke. All died.

"Why weren't we warned about this when you offered us the S'eye effect?"

*Warned?*

"Yes. You offered—"

*Not offer. Fellows explain effect. Sentients of your wave expose great joy. They offer exchange of maintenance. You call this pay, not so?*

"We should have been warned."

*Why?*

"Well, you don't live forever, do you?"

*Explain this term, forever.*

"Forever—always. Infinity."

*Sentients of your wave seek infinity?*

"Not for individuals but for—"

*Sentient species, they seek infinity?*

"Of course they do."

*Why?*

"Doesn't everyone?"

*But what about other species for which yours must make way? You not believe in evolution?*

"Evo—" McKie shook his head sharply. "What's that have to do with it?"

*All beings have own day and depart,* the Caleban said. *Day correct term? Day, unit of time, alloted linearity, normal extent of existence—you hang this?*

McKie's mouth moved but no words came out.

*Length of line, time of existence,* the Caleban said. *Approximately translated, correct?*

"But what gives you the right to—terminate us?" McKie demanded, finding his voice.

*Right not assumed, McKie. Given condition of proper connectives, another of my fellows takes up S'eye—control before self reaches ultimate discontinuity. Unusual—circumstance rejects such solution here. Mliss Abnethe and—associates shorten your one-track. My fellows leave.*

"They ran for it while they had time? I understand."

*Time—yes, your single-track line. This comparison provides suitable concept. Inadequate but sufficient.*

"And you are definitely the last Caleban in our—wave?"

*Self alone. Terminal end-point Caleban—yes. Self confirms description.*

"Wasn't there any way to save yourself?" McKie asked.

*Save? Ahhh—avoid? Evade! Yes, evade ultimate discontinuity. This you suggest?*

"I'm asking if there wasn't some

way for you to escape the way your fellows did?"

*Way exists but result same for your wave.*

"You could save yourself but it would end us—is that it?"

*You not possess honor concept? Save self, lose honor.*

"*Touché*," McKie said.

*Explain touché. New term.*

"Eh? Oh, that's a very, old, ancient term."

*Linear beginning term, you say? Yes, those best with nodal frequency.*

"Nodal frequency?"

*You say—often. Nodal frequency contains often.*

"They mean the same thing? I see."

*Not same. Similar.*

"I stand corrected."

*Explain touché. What meaning conveys this term?*

"Meaning conveys—yeah. It's a fencing term."

*Fencing? You signify containment?*

McKie explained fencing as best he could with a side journey into swordsmanship, the concept of single combat, competition.

*Effective touch,* the Caleban interrupted, her words conveying definite wonder. *Nodal intersection. Touché! Ahhh-ahhh! This contains why we find your species to fascinate us. This concept! Cutting line: touché! Pierced by meaning: touché!*

"Ultimate discontinuity," McKie snarled. "*Touché*! How far away is your next *touché* with the whip?"

*Intersection of whip touché! You seek position of linear displacement, yes. It moves me. We perhaps occupy our linearities yet g-but self suggests another species may need these dimensions. We leave, outgo from existence, then. Not so?*

When McKie didn't answer, the Caleban said: *McKie, you hang my meaning?*

"I think I'm going to sabotage you," McKie muttered.

## IX

CHEO, the ego-frozen Pan Spechi, stared out across the forest toward sunset over the sea. It was good, he thought, that the Ideal World contained such a sea. This tower Mliss had ordered built in a city of lesser buildings and spires commanded a view which included also the distant plain and far away mountains of the interior.

A steady wind blew against his left cheek, stirred his yellow hair. He wore green trousers and an open-mesh shirt of dull gold and gray. The clothing gave a subtle accent to his humanoid appearance, revealing the odd ripples of alien muscles here and there about his body.

An amused smile occupied his mouth but not his eyes. He had Pan Spechi eyes, many-faceted, glistening—although the facets were edge-faded by his ego-surgery. The eyes watched the insect movements of various sentients on streets and bridgeways below him. At the same time they reported on the sky overhead (a far-away flock of birds, streamers of sunset

clouds) and told him of the view toward the sea and the nearby ballus trade.

*We're going to pull it off.*

He glanced at the antique chronograph Mliss had given him. Crude thing, but it showed the sunset hour. They had had to disengage from the Taprisiot mindclock system, though. This crude device showed two hours to go until the next contact.

*They can't stop us.*

*But maybe they can . . .*

He thought about McKie then. How had the BuSab agent found this place? And finding it, how had he come here? McKie sat in the Beachball with the Caleban right now—bait, obviously. Bait!

For what?

Cheo didn't enjoy the contradictory emotions surging back and forth through him. He had broken the most basic Pan Spechi law. He had captured his creche's ego and abandoned his four mates to a mindless existence terminating in mindless death. A renegade surgeon's instruments had excised the organ which united the pentarchal Pan Spechi family across all space. The surgery had left a scar on Cheo's forehead and a scar on his soul but he had never imagined he would find such delicate relish in the experience.

Nothing could take the ego from him.

But he was alone, too.

Death would end it, of course, but all creatures had that to face.

And thanks to Mliss, he had a retreat from which no other Pan Spechi could extricate him—unless —but there would be no other Pan Spechi very soon. There would be no other organized sentients at all except the handful Mliss had brought here to her Ark with its mad Boers and Blacks.

Abnethe came hurrying onto the observation deck behind him. His ears, as multi-planar in discrimination as his eyes, marked the emotions in her footsteps—boredom, worry, the constant fear which constricted her being.

Cheo turned.

She had been to a Beautybarber, he observed. Red hair now crowned her lovely face. McKie had red hair, too, Cheo reminded himself. She threw herself onto a reclining chairdog, stretched her legs.

"What's your hurry?" he asked.

"Those Beautybarbers," she snapped. "They want to go *home*."

"Send them."

"But where will I find others?"

"That is a proper problem, isn't it?"

"You're making fun of me, Cheo. Don't."

"Then tell them they can't go home."

"I did."

"Did you tell them why?"

"Of course not. What a thing to say!"

"You told Furuneo."

"I learned my lesson. Where are my legal people?"

"They've already gone."

"But I had other things to discuss with them."

"Won't it wait?"

"You knew we had other business. Why did you let them go?"

"Mliss, you don't really want to know the other matter on their minds."

"The Caleban's to blame," she said. "That's our story and no one can disprove it. What was the other matter the legal numb-heads wanted to discuss?"

"Mliss, drop it."

"Cheo!"

His Pan Spechi eyes glittered suddenly. "As you wish. They conveyed a demand from BuSab. They have asked the Caleban for Furuneo's head."

"His—" She paled. "But how did they know we—"

"They know nothing. But theirs was an obvious move under the circumstances."

"What did you tell them?" she whispered. She stared at his face.

"I told them the Caleban closed the S'eye jumpdoor just as Furuneo was entering it of his own volition."

"But they know we have a monopoly on that S'eye," she said, her voice stronger. "Damn them!"

"Ahhh," Cheo said, "but Fanny Mae has been moving McKie and his friends around. That indicates we have no monopoly."

"That's exactly what I said before. Isn't it?"

"It gives us the perfect delaying tactic," he said. "Fanny Mae sent the head somewhere and we don't know where. I've told her, of course, to deny this request."

She swallowed. "Is that—what you told them?"

"Of course."

"But if they question the Caleban—"

"They're just as likely to get a confusing answer as a usable one."

"That was very clever of you, Cheo."

"Isn't that why you keep me around?"

"I keep you around for mysterious reasons of my own," she said, smiling.

"I depend on that," he said.

"You know," she said, "I'll miss them."

"Miss whom?"

"The ones who hunt us."

BILDOON stood in the doorway to Tuluk's personal lab, his back to the long outer room where the Wreave's assistants did most of their work. The BuSab chief's deepset eyes held a faceted glitter, a fire that failed to match the composure of his humanoid Pan Spechi face.

Tuluk was working at a bench against the opposite wall. He had a length of bullwhip rawhide stretched between two clamps. Parallel with the rawhide and about a millimeter below it was a metal pole, balanced on air without visible support. Between rawhide and pole could be seen flickers of miniature lightning—it danced along the entire length of the gap. Tuluk was bent over, reading meters set into the bench beneath the device.

"Am I interrupting anything?" Bildoon asked.

Tuluk turned a knob on the bench, waited, turned the knob once more. He caught the pole as the invisible supporting force released it. He racked the pole on

supports against the back wall above the bench.

"That is a silly question," he said, turning.

"It is, at that," Bildoon said. "We have a problem."

"Without problems, we have no employment," Tuluk said.

"I don't think we're going to get Furuneo's head," Bildoon said.

"It's been so long now, we probably couldn't have gotten a reliable nerve replay anyway," Tuluk said. He screwed his face slit into an S-curve, an expression he knew aroused amusement among other sentients. But it represented intense thought for a Wreave. "What do the astronomers say about the star pattern McKie saw on that mysterious planet?"

"They think there may have been an error in the mindcord."

"Oh. Why?"

"For one thing, there isn't even a hint, not the slightest subjective indication of variation in stellar magnitudes."

"All the visible stars had the same light intensity?"

"Apparently."

"Odd."

"And the nearest pattern similarity," Bildoon said, "is one that doesn't exist any more."

"What do you mean?"

"Well—there's a Big Dipper, a Little Dipper, various other constellations and zodiac similarities but—"

He shrugged.

Tuluk stared at him blankly. "I don't recognize the referrences," he said, presently.

"Oh, yes—I forgot," Bildoon said. "We Pan Spechi, when we decided to copy human form, explored their history with some care. These patterns of stars are ones that were visible from their ancient homeworld."

"I see. Another oddity to go with what I've discovered about the material of this whip."

"What's that?"

"It's very strange. Parts of this leather betray a subatomic structure of peculiar alignment."

"Peculiar? How?"

"Aligned. Perfectly aligned. I've never seen anything like it outside certain rather fluid energy phenomena. It's as though the material had been subjected to some peculiar force or stress. The result is, in some ways, similar to neomaser alignment of light quanta."

"Wouldn't that require enormous energy?"

"Presumably."

"But what could cause it?"

"I don't know. The interesting thing is that it doesn't appear to be a permanent change. The structure shows characteristics like plastic memory. It's slowly snapping back into reasonably familiar forms."

Bildoon heard the emphasis that betrayed Tuluk's disturbance.

"Reasonably familiar?" he asked.

"That's another thing," Tuluk said. "Let me explain. These subatomic structures and their resultant overstructures of

genetic message units undergo slow evolution. We can, by comparing structures, date some samples to within two or three thousand standard years. Since cattle cells form the basic protein for vat culture food, we have fairly complete records on them over a very long time indeed. The strange thing about the samples in this piece of rawhide—" he gestured with a mandibular extensor— "is that its pattern is very ancient."

"How ancient?"

"Perhaps several hundred thousand years."

Bildoon absorbed this. Then: "But you told us earlier that this rawhide was only a couple of years old."

"According to our catalyzing tests, it is."

"Could this alignment stress have mixed up the pattern?"

"Conceivably."

"You doubt it, then?"

"I do."

"You're not trying to tell me that whip was brought forward through time?"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything outside the facts I've reported. Two tests, previously considered reliable, do not agree as to the dating of this material."

"Time travel's an impossibility," Bildoon said.

"So we've always assumed."

"We know it. We know it mathematically and pragmatically. It's a fiction device, a myth, an amusing concept employed by entertainers. We reject it and we are left without paradox. Only one conclusion remains: the alignment stress, whatever that was, changed the pattern."

"If the rawhide were—squeezed through a subatomic filter of some sort, that might account for it," Tuluk said. "But since I have no such filter or the power to do this theoretical squeezing, I cannot test it."

"You must have some thoughts about it, though."

"I do. I cannot conceive of a filter that would do this thing without destroying the materials subjected to such forces."

"Then what you're saying," Bildoon said, his voice rising in angry frustration, "is that an impossible device did an impossible thing to that impossible piece of —of—"

"Yes, sir," Tuluk said.

BILDOON noticed that Tuluk's aides in the outer room were turning their faces toward him, showing signs of amusement. He stepped fully into the lab, closed the door.

"I came down here hoping you'd found something that might force their hand," Bildoon said, "and you give me conundrums."

"Your displeasure doesn't change the facts," Tuluk said.

"No, I guess it doesn't."

"The structure of the Palenki arm cells was aligned in a similar fashion," Tuluk said. "But only around the cut."

"You anticipated my next question."

"It was obvious. Passage

through a jumpdoor doesn't account for it. We sent several of our people through jumpdoors with various materials and tested random cells—living and dead—for a check."

"Two conundrums in an hour is more than I like," Bildoon said.

"Two?"

"We now have twenty-eight positional incidents of Abnethe flogging that Caleban or attempting to flog it. That's enough to show us they do not define a cone in space. Unless she's jumping around from planet to planet, that theory's wrong."

"Given the powers of that S'eye, she could be jumping around."

"We don't think so. That isn't her way. She's a nesting bird. She likes a citadel. She's the kind who castles in chess when she doesn't have to."

"She could be sending her Palenkis."

"She's there with them every time."

"We've collected six whips and arms in all," Tuluk said. "Do you want me to repeat these tests on all of them?"

Bildoon stared at the Wreave. The question wasn't like him. Tuluk was plodding, thorough.

"What would you rather be doing?" Bildoon asked.

"We have twenty-eight examples," you say. "Twenty-eight is one of the euclidian perfects. It's four times the prime seven. The number strongly indicates randomness. But we're faced with a situation apparently excluding randomness. Ergo, an organizing pattern is at work which is not revealed by analytic numbering as far as we've taken it. I would like to subject the spacing—both in time and physical dimension—to a complete analysis, compare for any similarities we—"

"You'd put an assistant on the other whips and arms to check them out?"

"That goes without saying."

Bildoon shook his head. "What Abnethe's doing—it's impossible!"

"If she does a thing, how can it be impossible?"

"She and her crew have to be somewhere," Bildoon snapped.

"I find it very strange," Tuluk said, "this trait you share with humans of stating the obvious in such emphatic fashion."

"Oh, go to hell," Bildoon said. He turned, slammed out of the lab.

Tuluk, racing to the door after him, opened it and called at the retreating back, "It is a Wreave belief that we already are in hell."

He returned to his bench, muttering. Humans and Pan Spechi—impossible creatures. Except for McKie. Now, there was a human who occasionally achieved analytic rapport with sentients capable of higher logic. Well—every species had its exceptions to the norm.

BY AN effort of communication he still did not completely understand, McKie had talked the Caleban into opening the Beachball's external port. This permitted a bath of spray-washed air to flow to where he sat. It also accomplished one other thing—it

allowed a crew of watchers outside to hold eyeball contact with him. He had just about given up hoping Abnethe would rise to the bait. There would have to be another solution. Visual contact with watchers also permitted a longer spacing between Taprisiot guard contacts. He found the new spacing less tiresome.

Morning sunshine splashed across the lip of the opening into the Beachball. McKie put a hand into the light, felt the warmth. He knew he should be moving around, making a poor target of himself, but the presence of the watchers made attack unlikely. Besides, he was tired, drugged to alertness and full of the odd emotions induced by *angaret*. Movement seemed an empty effort. If they wanted to kill him they were going to do it. Furuneo's death proved that.

From where he sat McKie could see out across the lava shelf to the rocky palisades and a mossy carpeting of sea growth exposed at the cliff base by the retreating tide.

"Suppose we have it all wrong," he said, speaking over his shoulder toward the Caleban. "Suppose we really aren't communicating with each other at all. What if we've just been making noises, assuming a communication content that doesn't exist?"

*I fail of understanding, McKie. The hang doesn't get me.*

McKie turned slightly. The Caleban was doing something strange with the air around its position. The oval stage he had seen earlier shimmered once more into view, disappeared. A golden halo appeared at one side of the giant spoon, rose like a smoke ring, crackled electrically and vanished.

"We're assuming," McKie said, "that when you say something to me I respond with meaningful words directly related to your statement—and that you do the same. This may not be the cast at all."

*Unlikely.*

"So it's unlikely. What are you doing there?"

*Doing?*

"All that activity around you."

*Attempt making self visible on your wave.*

"Can you do it?"

*Possible.*

A bell-shaped red glow formed above the spoon, stretched into a straight line, resumed it bell curve, began whirling like a child's jump rope.

*What see you?* the Caleban asked.

McKie described the whirling red rope.

*Very odd,* the Caleban said. *I flex creativity and you report visible sensation. You need yet that opening to exterior conditions?*

"The open port? It makes it one helluva lot more comfortable in here."

*Comfort—concept self fails to understand.*

"Does the opening prevent you from becoming visible?"

*It performs magnetic distraction, no more.* McKie shrugged.

"How much more flogging can you take?"

*Explain much.*

"You've left the track again," McKie said.

*Correct! That forms achievement, McKie.*

"How is it an achievement?"

*Self leaves communicative track and you achieve awareness of same.*

"All right, that's an achievement. Where's Abnethe?"

*Contract—*

"—prohibits revealing her location," McKie completed. "Maybe you can tell me, then—is she jumping around or remaining on one planet?"

*That helps you locate her?*

"How in fifty-seven hells do I know?"

*Probability smaller than fifty-seven elements,* the Caleban said. *Abnethe occupies relatively static position on specific planet.*

"But we can't find any pattern to her attacks on you or where they originate."

*You cannot see connectives.*

THE whirling red rope flickered in and out of existence above the giant spoon. Abruptly it shifted color to a glowing yellow, vanished.

"You just disappeared," McKie said.

*Not my person visible.*

"How's that?"

*You not seeing person-self.*

"That's what I said."

*Not say. Visibility to you not represent sameness of my person. You visible-see effect.*

"I wasn't seeing you, eh? That was just some effect you created."

*Correct.*

"I didn't think it was you. You're going to be something more shapely. I do notice something, though. There are moments when you used our verb tenses better—I even spotted some fairly normal constructions."

*Self hangs this get me.*

"Yeah, well—maybe you're not getting the hang of our language, after all."

McKie stood up, stretched, moved closer to the open port, intending to peer out. As he moved, a shimmering silver loop dropped out of the air where he had been. He whirled in time to see it snake back through the small vortal tube of a jumpdoor.

"Abnethe, is that you?" McKie demanded.

There was no answer. The jumpdoor snapped out of existence.

The enforcers watching from outside rushed to the port.

One called, "You all right, McKie?"

McKie waved him to silence, took a raygen from his pocket, held it loosely in his hand.

"Fanny Mae," he said, "are they trying to capture or kill me the way they took care of Furuneo?"

*Observe theyness,* the Caleban said. *Furuneo not having existence, observable intentions unknown.*

"Did you see what just happened here?" McKie asked.

*Self contains awareness of S'eye employment, certain activity of employer persons. Activity ceases.*

McKie rubbed his left hand across his neck. He wondered if he

could bring the raygen into play quickly enough to cut any snare they might drop over his head. That silver thing dropping into the room had looked suspiciously like a noose.

"Is that how they got Furuneo?" McKie asked. "Did they drop a noose over his neck and pull him into the jumpdoor?"

*Discontinuity removes person of sameness,* the Caleban said.

McKie shrugged, gave it up. That was more or less the answer the Caleban gave to all questions about Furuneo's death.

Oddly, McKie discovered he was hungry. He wiped perspiration from his jaw and chin, cursed under his breath. There was no real assurance that what he heard in the Caleban's words represented true communication. Even granting some communication, how could he depend on the Caleban's interpretations or the Caleban's honesty? When the damn thing spoke, though, it radiated such a sense of sincerity that disbelief became almost impossible. McKie rubbed his chin, trying to catch an elusive thought. Strange. Here he was, hungry, angry and afraid. He had no place to run. He had to solve this problem. Imperfect as communication with the Caleban actually was, the warning from the creature could not be ignored. Too many sentients already had died or gone insane.

HE SHOOK his head at the flybuzz of Taprisiot contact. Damn surveillance. This contact, however, failed to break off. It was Siker, the Laclac Director of Discretion. Siker had detected McKie's disturbed emotions and, instead of breaking contact, locked in.

"No!" McKie raged. He felt himself stiffen into the mumbling sniggertrance. "No, Siker! Break off!"

"But what's wrong, McKie?"

"Break off, you idiot, or I'm done for!"

"Well—all right. But you felt—"

"Break it!"

Siker broke the contact.

Once more aware of his body, McKie found himself dangling from a noose which had choked off his breath and was pulling him up into a small jumpdoor. He heard scrambling at the open port. He heard shouts but he couldn't respond. Fire encircled his neck. His chest burned. Panic filled his mind. He found he had dropped the raygen during the sniggertrance. He was helpless. His hands clawed futilely at the noose.

Something grabbed his feet. Added weight tightened the noose.

Abruptly the lifting force gave way. McKie fell, sprawling in a tangle with whoever had grabbed his feet.

Several things happened at once. Enforcers helped him to his feet. A holoscan held by a Wreave was shoved past his face toward the jumpdoor which closed with an electric snap. Groping hands and extensors removed the noose from his neck.

McKie inhaled a choking breath, gasped. He would have collapsed

without the support of those around him.

Gradually he became aware that five other sentients had entered the Beachball—two Wreaves, a Laclac, a Pan Spechi and a Human. The Human and one of the Wreaves worked over McKie, clearing away the noose and supporting him. The holoscan operator was a Wreave, who was busy examining his instrument. The others were watching the space all around them, raygens ready. At least three sentients were trying to talk at the same time.

"All right!" McKie shut off the babble. His throat hurt when he spoke. He grabbed the length of noose from the Wreave's extensors, examined it. The rope was of a silvery material McKie failed to recognize. It had been cut cleanly with a raygen. McKie looked at the enforcer with the holoscan, asked, "What did you get?"

"The attack was made by an ego-frozen Pan Spechi, ser," the Wreave enforcer said. "I got a good record of his face. We'll try for ID."

McKie tossed him the severed length of noose.

"Get this thing back to the lab, too. Tell Tuluk to break it down to its basic structure. It may even have some of—Furuneo's cells on it. The rest of you—"

"Ser?" It was the Pan Spechi among the enforcers.

"Yes?"

"Ser, we have orders. If an attempt is made on your life we are to stay with you in here." He passed a raygen to McKie. "You dropped this, I believe."

McKie pocketed it with an angry gesture.

Taprisiot contact filled McKie's mind. "Break it!" he snapped.

But the contact firmed. It was Bildoon in a no-nonsense mood. "What's going on there; McKie?"

McKie explained.

"There are enforcers around you right now?"

"Yes."

"Anyone see the attackers?"

"We got a holoscan. It was the ego-frozen Pan Spechi."

McKie felt the emotional shudder from his Bureau chief. The sensation of horror was followed by a sharp command.

"I want you back here at Central immediately."

"Look," McKie reasoned. "I'm the best bait we have. They want me dead for some—"

"Back and now!" Bildoon said. "I'll have you brought in forcibly if you make that necessary."

McKie subsided. He had never before experienced such a black mood from a caller.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"You're bait wherever you are, McKie—there or here. If they want you they'll come for you. I want you here where we can surround you with guards."

"Something has happened?"

"You're damn right something's happened. All those bullwhips we were examining have disappeared. The lab is a shambles and one of Tuluk's assistants is dead—decapitated. And we've lost the head."

"Ahhhhh, damn," McKie said. Then: "I'm on my way."



X

CHEO sat cross-legged on a bare stretch of floor in the anteroom of his quarters. A sharply defined orange cross light from windows in the next room stretched his shadow beside him like something lifeless from the night. In his hands he held the length of noose that remained after it had been cut in the closing of the jumpdoor.

Damnable interference! That big Laclac with the raygen had been fast. And the Wreave with the holoscan had made a record through the jumpdoor—no doubt of that. Authorities would start hunting back along his trail now, asking questions, showing the holoscan of his face.

Cheo's jeweled eyes glittered with shards of light. He could almost hear the BuSab operatives.

*Do you recognize this Pan Spechi?*

The Pan Spechi equivalent of a chuckle, a rumbling grunt, shook him. Fat lot of good the search would do them. No friend or acquaintance from the old days would be likely to recognize this face, now that the medics had changed it. Oh, the bridge of the nose and the set of the eyes were similar but . . .

Cheo shook his head. Why was he worrying? No one—absolutely no one—was going to stop him from destroying the Caleban. And after that all these conjectures would be academic.

He sighed heavily. His hands gripped the length of rope so tightly that his muscles ached. It took



him several heartbeats of effort to release them. He climbed to his feet, threw the severed rope at a wall. A flailing end of it lashed a chairdog which whimpered sibilantly through its atrophied vocal structure.

Cheo nodded to himself. He had to get the guards away from the Caleban or the Caleban away from the guards. He rubbed the scars on his forehead, hesitated. Was that a sound behind him? Slowly he turned, lowered his hand. He gasped.

Mliss Abnethe stood in the doorway to the outer hall. The orange light created embers in the pearl sheathing of her gown. Her face held back anger, fear and the grievous murmurings of her psyche.

"How long have you been there?" he asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

"Why?" She stepped into the room, closed the door. "What have you been doing?"

"Fishing," he said.

She swept the room with her insolent gaze, saw the pile of whips in a corner. They were thrown over something vaguely round and hairy. A wet red stain crept onto the floor from beneath the pile.

She paled, whispered, "What's that?"

"Get out of here, Mliss."

"What have you been doing?" she shrieked, whirling on him.

*I should tell her—I should really tell her . . .*

I've been working to save our lives," he said.

"You've killed someone, haven't you?"

"He didn't suffer," Cheo said, his voice tired.

"But you—"

"What's one more death among the quadrillions we're planning?" he asked.

By all the devils of Gowachin, she was a tiresome bitch.

"Cheo, I'm afraid."

Why did she have to whimper like that?

"Calm yourself," he said. "I've a plan to separate the Caleban from her guardians. When we achieve that we can proceed with her destruction and the thing's done."

Mliss swallowed.

"She suffers. I know she does."

"That's nonsense. You've heard her deny it. She doesn't even know what pain means. No referents."

"But what if we're wrong? What if it's just a misunderstanding?"

He advanced on her, stood glaring over her. "Mliss, do you have any idea of how much we'll suffer if we fail?"

She shuddered.

Presently, her voice almost normal, she asked, "What's your plan?"

MCKIE felt danger signals from every nerve ending. He stood with Tuluk in the Wreave's lab. The place should have been comfortingly familiar but McKie felt as though the walls had been removed, opening the lab onto boundless space from which attack could come. No matter which way he turned, his back was exposed to menace. Abnethe and her friends were getting desperate. The fact of desperation said she was vulnerable. If only he could understand her vulnerability. Where was she vulnerable? What was her weakness?

And where had she hidden herself?

"This is very strange material," Tuluk said, straightening from the bench where he'd been examining the silvery rope. "Very strange."

"What's strange about it?"

"It cannot exist."

"But it's right there."

McKie pointed.

"I can see that, my friend."

Tuluk extruded a single mandible, scratched thoughtfully at the right lip of his face slit. One orange eye became visible as he turned, glanced at McKie.

"Well?" McKie said.

"The only planet where this material could have been grown ceased to exist several millennia ago," Tuluk said. "There was only one place—a peculiar combination of chemistry and solar energy—"

"You've got to be mistaken. The stuff's right there."

"The Archer's eye," Tuluk said. "You recall the story of the nova there?"

McKie cocked his head to one side, thought for a moment.

Then: "I've read about it, yes."

"The planet was called Rap," Tuluk said. "This is a length of Rapvine."

"Rapvine?"

"You've heard of it?"

"I don't believe so."

"Yes, well—it's strange stuff. Has a relatively short life span,

among its other peculiar characteristics. Another thing—the ends don't fray even when it's cut. See?" Tuluk plucked several strands from the cut end, released them. They snapped back into position. "The phenomenon was called intrinsic attraction. There's been considerable speculation about it. I'm now in a position to—"

"Short life," McKie interrupted. "How short?"

"No more than fifteen or twenty standard years under the most ideal conditions."

"But the planet—"

"Millennia ago, yes."

McKie shook his head to clear it. His eyes scanned the length of silvery rope suspiciously.

"Obviously somebody found how to grow the stuff someplace other than Rap."

"Perhaps. But they've managed to keep it a secret all this time."

"I don't like what I think you're thinking," McKie said.

"That's the most convoluted statement I've ever heard you make," Tuluk said. "It's meaning is clear enough, however. You believe I'm considering the possibility of time travel or—"

"Impossible," McKie snapped.

"I've been engaged in a most interesting mathematical analysis of this problem," Tuluk said.

"Numbers games aren't going to help us."

"Your behavior is most un-McKie," Tuluk said. "Irrational. Therefore, I'll try not to burden your mind with too much of my symbolic construction. It is, however, more than a game for—"

"Time travel," McKie said. "Nonsense."

"Our habitual forms of perception tend to interfere with the thinking processes required for analysis of this problem," Tulik said. "Thus, I discard these modes of thought."

"Such as?"

"If we examine the series relationships, what do we have? We have a number of point-dimensions in space. Abnethe occupies a position on a specific planet, as does the Caleban. We are given the actuality of contact between the two points, a series of events."

"So?"

"We must assume a pattern to these point-contacts."

"Why? They could be random examp—"

"Two specific planets whose movements describe coherent patterns in space. A pattern, a rhythm. Otherwise Abnethe and her crew would be attacking with more frequency. We are confronted by a system which defies conventional analysis. It has temporal rhythm translatable into point-series rhythm. It is spatial and temporal."

McKie felt the attraction of Tuluk's argument as a force lifting his mind out of a cloud. "Some form of reflection, maybe?" he asked. "It doesn't have to be Time trav—"

"This is not a fugue," Tuluk objected. "A simple quadratic equation achieves no eliptical functions here. Ergo, we are dealing with linear relationships."

"Lines," McKie whispered. "Connectives."

"Eh? Oh, yes. Linear relationships which describe moving surfaces across some form or forms of dimension. We cannot be sure of the Caleban's dimensional outlook but our own is another matter."

MCKIE pursed his lips. Tuluk had moved into an extremely thin air of abstractions. But the Wreave's argument held an inescapable elegance.

"We can treat all forms of space as quantities determined by other quantities," Tuluk said. "We have methods for dealing with such forms when we wish to solve for unknowns."

McKie murmured, "N-dimension points."

"Precisely. We first consider our data as a series of measurements which define moving points, remembering that they also define the space between such points."

McKie nodded. "A classic *n*fold extended aggregate."

"Now you begin to sound like the McKie familiar to me. An aggregate of *n* dimensions, to be sure. And what is time in such a problem? Time we know to be an aggregate of one dimension. But we are given, you'll recall, a number of point-dimensions in space and time."

McKie whistled soundlessly, admiring the Wreave's logic.

Then: "We either have one continuous variable in the problem or *n* continuous variables. Beautiful!"

"Just so. And by reduction through the infinity calculus we discover we are dealing with two systems containing *n*-body properties."

"That's what you found?"

"That's what I found. It can only follow that the point-contacts of our problem have their separate existence within different frameworks of time. Ergo, Abnethe occupies a dimension of time other than that of the Beachball. Inescapable conclusion."

"We may not be dealing with time travel phenomena in the classic fictional sense," McKie said. "These subtle differences the Caleban sees—these connectives, these threads—"

"Spiderwebs imbedded in many universes," Tuluk said. "Perhaps. Let's assume individual lives spin these web threads."

"Movements of matter undoubtedly spin them, too."

"Agreed. And they cross. They unite. They intersect. They combine in mysterious ways. They become tangled. Some of the web threads are stronger than others. I experienced this entanglement, you know, when I placed the call that saved your life. I can imagine some of these threads being rewoven, combined, aligned—what have you—to recreate conditions of long past times in our dimensions. Might be a relatively simple problem for a Caleban. The Caleban might not even understand the re-creation the way we do."

"I'll buy that."

"What would it take?" Tuluk mused. "A certain poignancy of experience, perhaps—something

that imparts sufficient strength to the lines, threads, webs of the past for them to be picked up, manipulated to reproduce the original setting and its contents."

"We're just tossing words back and forth," McKie objected. "How could you reweave an entire planet or the space around—"

"Why not? What do we know of the powers involved? To a crawling insect three of your strides may be a day's journey."

McKie felt himself being convinced in spite of native caution.

"It is true," he agreed, "that the Caleban S'eye gives us the power to walk across light years."

"Such a common exploit that we no longer even wonder at the enormous energies it must require. Think what such a journey would mean to our hypothetical insect. And we may be getting the merest glimpse of Caleban powers."

"We should never have accepted the S'eye," McKie said. "We had perfectly adequate FTL ships and metabolic suspension. We should have told the Calebans to go jump in their collective connectives!"

"And deny ourselves real-time control of our universe? Not on your life, McKie. What we should have done is test the gift first. We should have probed for dangers. We were too bedazzled by it, though."

McKie lifted his left hand to scratch his eyebrow, felt a prickling of danger. It rushed up his spine, exploded in a blow against his arm. He felt pain there—something bit through to bone. Despite the shock he whirled, saw a Palenki arm upraised with a glittering blade. The arm came through a narrow vortal tube. Visible through the opening were a Palenki turtle head and, beside it, the right side of a Pan Spechi face—purple scar on the forehead, one faceted emerald eye.

For a suspended moment McKie saw the blade begin its descent toward his face, knew it was going to strike before his shocked muscles could respond. He felt metal touch his forehead, saw the orange glow of a raygen beam stab past his face.

McKie stood frozen, locked in stillness. It was a tableau. He saw surprise on the Pan Spechi face, saw a severed Palenki arm begin its tumble to the floor, still clutching a shattered metal remnant. McKie's heart was pounding as though he'd been running for an hour. He felt hot wetness spread across his left temple. It ran down his cheek, along his jaw, into his collar. His arm throbbed and he saw blood dripping from his fingertips.

The S'eye jumpdoor had winked out of existence.

Someone was beside him then, pressing a compress against his head where the metal had touched.

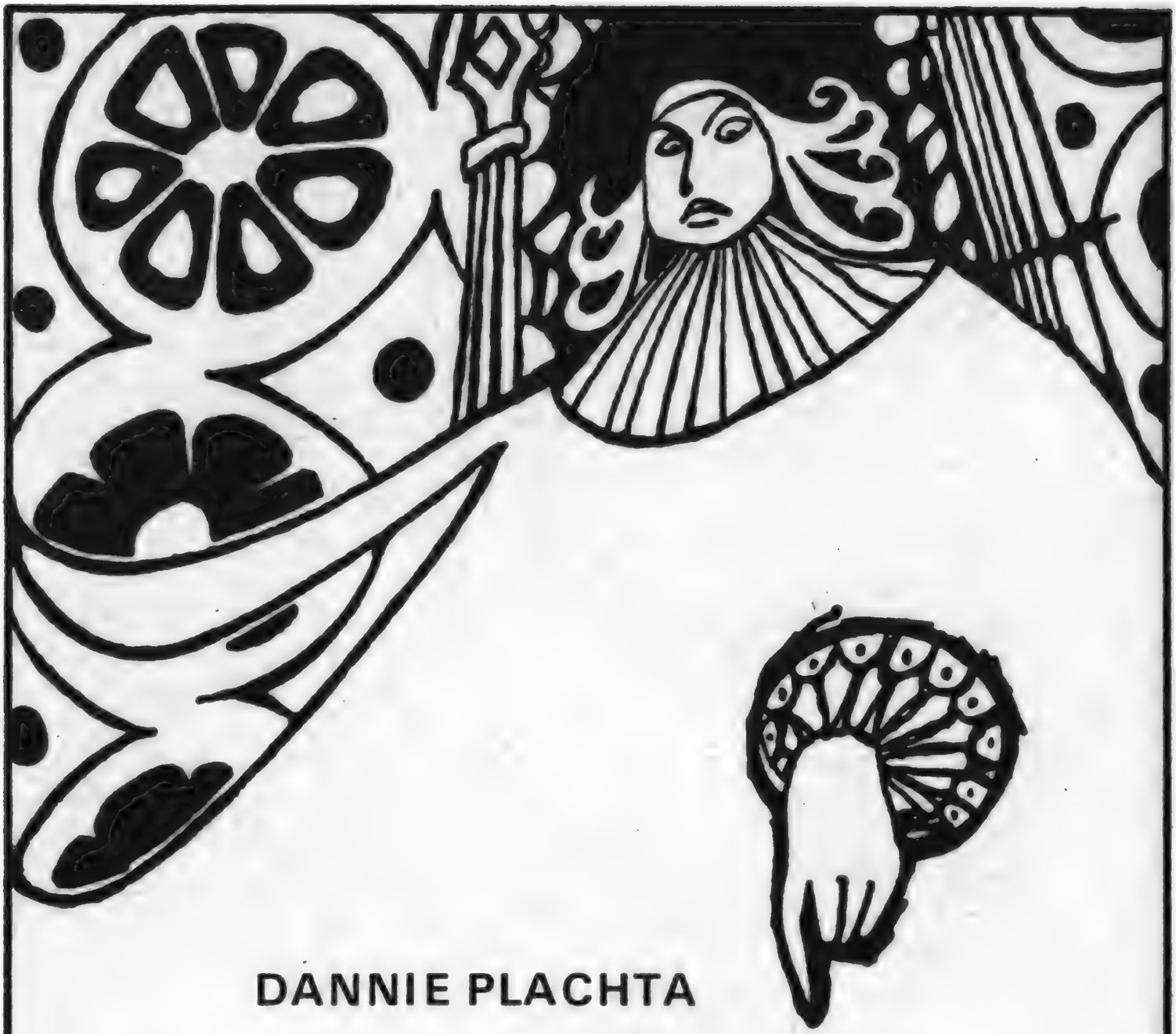
Touched?

Once more he had prepared himself for sudden death at a Palenki's hands. Tuluk, he saw, was bending to retrieve the metal remnant.

"That's another nick of time I've escaped," McKie said.

Surprisingly, there was no tremor in his voice.

TO BE CONTINUED



DANNIE PLACHTA

# THE TIME JUDGE

***The accused found no end to his crime—no beginning to justice!***

THE horses drew a tight curve into the night, jostling the coach's occupants against polished mahogany sills. A single lantern, its yellow flame high upon the wind, clanged as it swayed. Above the whirring of the rising dust, the Prisoner groaned brokenly in his sleep.

"We've an important one here," said the Watchman, hearing the Prisoner's groan.

"Aye, indeed," said the Coachman, his gaze far upon the stars. The reins jiggled lightly within his gloves. "What time is it?"

The Watchman peeked within his cloak. "Eighteen-thirteen," he said.

"A time of peace," said the Coachman, glancing over his shoulder, looking back into the night.

Shreds of fog began to swirl in place of the dust as a sudden clicking of tight cobbles sounded beneath the hooves and wheels. Overhead, the stars flickered and were quietly gone.

The Watchman checked the time. "Nineteen-thirty-nine," he said.

"A time of great turmoil," said the Coachman and there was distant thunder beyond the mist. He hurried the horses and several drops of rain shone upon his leather cape.

Again the Prisoner stirred in his sleep.

They sped over smooth concrete pavement but the coach shook with a fresh torrent of wind.

Tinkling sounds of shattered glass fell and watchdog rifles barked high above, where moments earlier there had been tranquil stars. Sirens screamed on both sides of the road. The horses shied from the yells of an advancing mob.

"Nineteen-sixty-eight," said the Watchman.

"Oh," said the Coachman and gripped the reins very tightly.

The coach and horses clattered on with two of the riders drowsy and the other asleep. One of the men, stirring within the flowing mist, cried out against the night.

The Watchman yawned behind a polite hand.

"It's getting late," he said, shifting upon his seat.

"A long ride," said the Coachman.

WHEN he was wheeled into the shadows and mist of the orange and black chamber of the Time Judge the Prisoner spat upon the flagstoned floor. He felt an urgent need to spit at the enrobed figure behind the great hulking rostrum but the target was beyond his practiced range. He tried anyway.

He sensed the constant rage within himself welling up to even greater levels as he clamped his eyes shut and steeled his rigid

muscles against the imprisoning bonds in a desperate effort to hold and savor his hate. For several seconds he succeeded, until the pressurized phlegm seeped out in a low whining scream.

"Administer a two-minute tranquilizer," said the solemn voice of the Time Judge. This was done before the high-ceilinged echoes of Judge and Prisoner had subsided.

The man bound within the wheelchair opened his eyes to watch the grim shadow above him. A languid mist curled about the high stone rostrum but there was a faint orange glow far beyond the bench. The Prisoner slowly relaxed his manacled arms and legs. His mouth remained fixed in a grimace.

"Out of all of my travels through Endless Time your case is the most terrible," said the Time Judge, shaking his head. "Yours is the most heinous, the most horrendous, crime of all. All of Time must shudder at your wicked presence."

The Prisoner continued to relax perceptibly but there was still much hatred within the room.

"Even through your violent hate you must be made to understand your just fate." The Time Judge pointed a long gnarled stick toward the Prisoner. "Woe be unto you, for the punishment must fit the crime."

A silence.

"I have traveled through all of Time," the Judge continued, "desperately righting the wrongs of past and future injustices, exchanging the minds and souls of the falsely condemned with those whose evil deeds cry out for vengeance. Now, at last, I have found yours, the ultimate crime, which will match the most pronounced injustice of all."

As the Time Judge paused, the Prisoner stirred. The period of tranquilization was nearly completed. The mist suddenly shifted, momentarily thinning about the Judge's bench, but the Prisoner turned his head and would not look.

"Do you have anything to say?" asked the somber figure in the black cape.

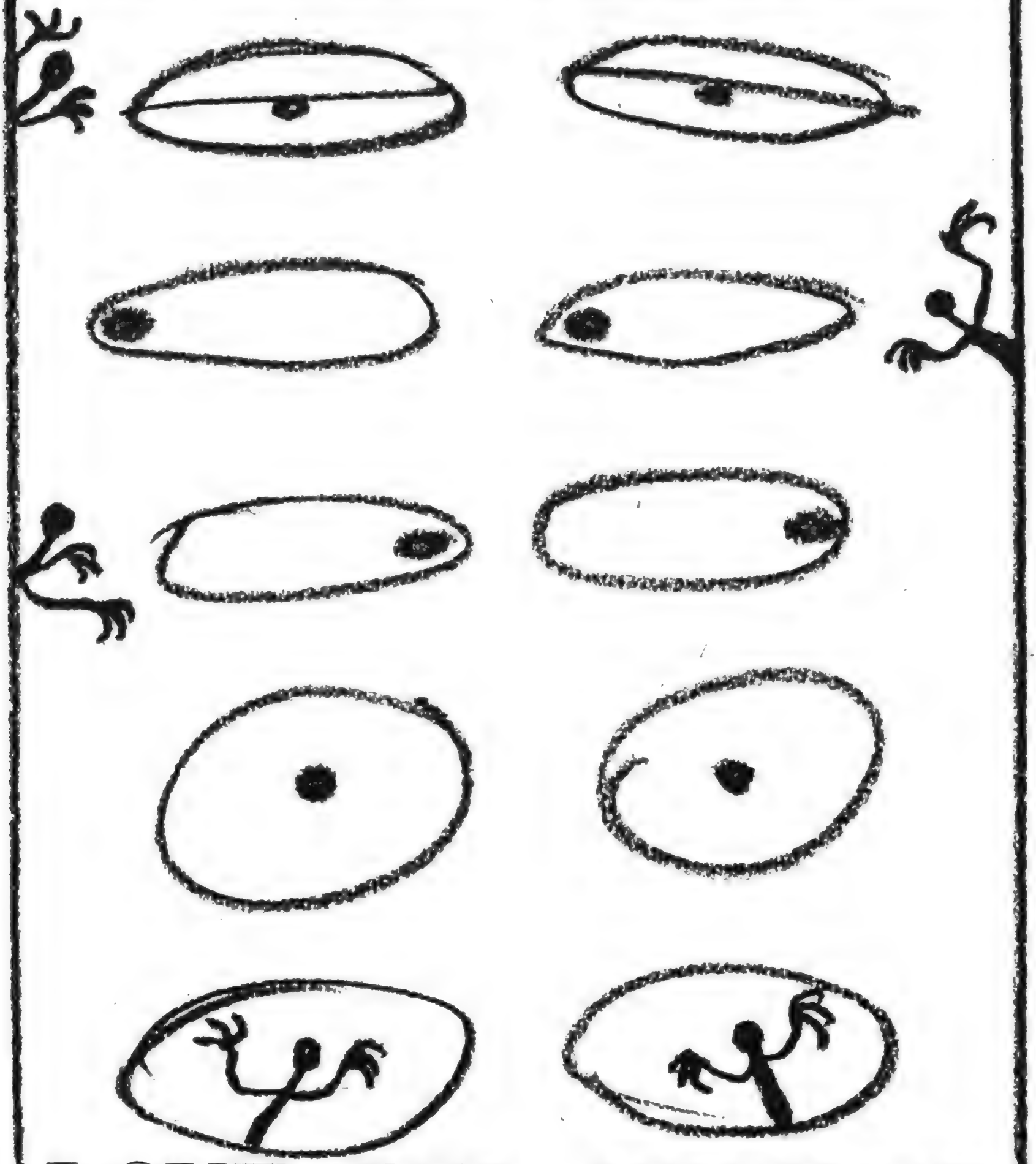
"Go to hell!" replied the red-faced man before him.

The fog stirred again, and the hooded figure placed an orange square of cloth upon his own head. "According to the Dictates of Timeless Justice, let him be so punished," ordered the Time Judge with a slight shudder of dark robes.

Within seconds the portable instruments were applied, and the Prisoner again closed his eyes upon his own intensifying hatred.

When he awoke with blinking eyes, he found himself erect and walking.

They took him before Pontius Pilate—who washed his hands. ●



# LOVE THY NEIGBOR

E. CLAYTON McCARTY

**The loving aliens came—and there went the neighborhood!**

JAKE TERRELL was at the phone, confirming an appointment with his dentist, when he first noticed the black shadow at the corner of his peripheral vision. He gave it little thought. This kind of ocular illusion usually could be traced to eyestrain, digestive problems or loss of sleep, to minute floating fragments of eye pigment or a sudden twist of the head—to almost any of a number of causes one could name. Persistence of the phenomenon finally triggered some degree of worry.

Jake found himself beginning to look behind furniture, inspecting dark corners of the room, usually feeling a bit foolish after each flurry of searching. But he could not restrain the urge to repeat the action—the apparition seemed substantial and it moved with definiteness.

There came a time when more surface of Jake's eyes caught the shadow just as it whisked behind a waste basket.

*Aha—the thing is real . . .*

Jake also whisked to the waste basket and lifted it. Nothing so tangible as a shape with dimensions lurked there—nothing but shadow.

It was then that he resolved to phone his oculist. The thing could not have escaped if it had been as large as Jake's eyes had measured it in the microsecond allowed by its speed. The object would have had to be at least the size of a tarantula and there was no crawling space for anything of that bulk in the corner behind the basket.

He strode to his telephone and arranged for the examination. But he was not to take it. A dental appointment was first on Jake's schedule—and fated to be last.

Each day, while waiting for these two appointed dates, Jake saw the shadow. It seemed closer to him at every appearance. But he no longer dropped his current activities to chase the manifestation. Like most humans he had bucked his problem off to someone else—in this case the oculist. Let the eye doctor take care of the shadow—he would charge enough.

So, if Jake sat at his typewriter when the fuzzy dark thing drifted into his field of vision he shrugged. If he happened to be too lazy to work he continued to allow cranium, vertebrae, coccyx and tarsus to press dents into the upholstery of a sofa, not even trying to catch the phantom object in the full focus of his gaze.

And one day it was there on the arm of Jake's sofa and he felt it—not as a solid body but as a touch of spring zephyr on neck, then on cheek and finally at the edge of his ear. He did not detect its progress inside the ear, except in the form of a slight puff of air. The episode seemed so real that a tingling chill shook Jake's spine.

He drew a long breath and lay back, wondering whether a psychiatrist would not be a better man to carry the problem than an oculist. Nothing occurred for half an hour. Then, like a guitar string suddenly twanged, the entire length of his body jerked into tense vibration. In Jake's mind began a wild sound and his vision blanked out completely.

Jake scrambled to his feet. He stood swaying, dizzy, blind, only half realizing his own throat was not uttering the sharp burst of excited squealing he heard inside his skull. The noise stopped suddenly and a tactile sensation substituted itself, impressions of momentary points of cold touching areas inside his head with extreme lightness. These sensory contacts skipped about, first in the upper part of the skull, then behind his eyes, then tickling his inner ears.

His sight finally returned. The vertigo left. Jake faced a possibility that he was skating on the edge of some type of mental disorder. He thought hard, wrestling with a new fear, trying to calm his nerves. When he could hold the phone again with reasonable steadiness he made his third appointment—with a psychiatrist, thinking ruefully of the hundred dollar-plus raid on his budget the three engagements would undoubtedly create.

Jake had no experience of shrinks beyond vague rumors. But he knew that if the whirligig in his head required treatment his first cost estimate could have some extra zeroes trailing behind it. And perhaps the cause might be physical—rebellion within some body organ, malfunction of some hidden glands.

Possibly he should add a date with an internist for a complete physical examination. He groaned, mentally watching a computer subtract dollars from his bank hoard, and decided to wait first for verdicts from dentist, eye man, and head-shrinker.

But Jake's odd symptoms faded even as he stood debating. His shoulders straightened and his habitual optimism returned. He ceased to picture himself as fodder for hospital or mental institution. Lunchtime came and went; the daily battle between desire to nap and need to finish the next installment of his syndicated column was fought and won by reluctant ambition—half the work stint lay imprinted upon white bond. And then a strange urge grabbed him.

THE impulse was as strong as a pregnant woman's yearning for some exotic food. Jake found himself irresistibly wanting to leave his typewriter, leave his room, leave the house. Destination? Purpose? Not the slightest notion.

And he discovered he had acted

upon the desire with such single-minded concentration that he had not been aware of any ambulatory exertion when he awoke from an almost hypnotic state to find himself on the street.

Driven by the same hidden mental force, Jake turned toward Mockingbird Heights, a heavily wooded section south of town which the local conservation society's efforts had pressured the city council into preserving in its natural state. And a frightening phenomenon grew in Jake's mind. His conscious self seemed to be dividing into two entities. The two halves waged stubborn battle in the arena of his skull.

He began to talk to himself, gibberish at first, sometimes aloud, sometimes with only the mental sounding of language syllables. But words separated themselves finally.

*Tree,* he heard in his head. *Up in the tree—up in the tree. Let's go to the trees.*

Morton Koenigsby and Harriet Tarbell rounded a corner right before him. Jake intended to greet them with, *Hi, there. Don't tell me quitting time exodus from the city has begun* . . . But the stronger hemisphere of his mental existence changed tongue movements into, "I have to go walk under the trees."

Jake moved on, acutely aware of two puzzled stares turned toward his receding form. He felt hot waves of embarrassment flowing to his face. *What the hell is happening to me?*

The answer came immediately: *Peace, contentment, happy life in a new world.*

Complete cacophony followed. The two halves of himself joined in desperate battle.

Jake tried to think: *I must be going crazy.*

But the sentence came out: *Crapiece, pretty wrrzi*—and crashed into head-splitting noise.

What seemed the sane segment of himself won temporarily by resorting to wild physical effort, activating lips and tongue and vocalizing loudly.

"What the devil am I talking about?"

"Ask somebody else, buddy," a cab driver passing by at the moment answered and moved along, muttering "Kook!" to himself to the tune of his rattling lunch box.

The war inside Jake's skull escalated to a new tempo with screaming sentences from both halves impinging upon each other and interlocking. Conflicting syllables combined until mental shouting became nothing comprehensible.

*Brackaboo - bubil - high - baloo-high - in - the - la - laloo - high - in - that - tree.*

Jake spoke aloud, trying to regain control of a runaway mind by physically forcing nonsense into understandable speech.

But his tongue said back to him, "La-la-la-bla-la!"

Jake walked with a gray mist in front of his eyes, only dimly aware that he turned from Edgewater Boulevard and crossed a meadow skirting dense woodland. Strangely, his steps were surer now. The mist cleared from his eyes and both warring voices retreated to the innermost corridors of his skull, with the one Jake still thought of as his own becoming increasingly less forceful. The part of his mind that was himself was being squeezed into a tiny corner. Jake sensed certainty that it would eventually cease to exist in spite of its determined resistance to some alien invasion.

Another odd phenomenon came to the front of Jake's attention—a queer sharpening of his senses. For the first time since the lazy days of his childhood he smelled again the decaying leaf mold, heard the windsong, listened to the groan of tree trunks bending and the scrunch of branches scraping against neighbors. Ecstatic tremors swept through him as he touched the rough bole of a pine and his finger traced with sensual delight long elliptical whorls of brown bark.

Vaguely Jake heard the lesser part of his mind crying, *What's happening to me?*

But another mental voice overrode the question, repeating several times, *God, what a' beautiful planet! A beauty all its own.*

Without surprise Jake experienced strong excitement in the sight and taste and smell and feel of his surroundings, as if he encountered each familiar component for the first time. He saw dark shadows between gold patches of late sunlight drifting earthward through filtering leaves and shivered with an ague of awe and wonderment.

*What a beautiful planet—what a strangely different world. . .*

*Different from what?* the stubborn, walled-in corner of Jake's mind tried to answer and was squeezed into an even smaller space by the other personality.

HE sensed some sort of plan just beyond reach of thought, a purpose as intangible as swamp steam, but it took him deeper into the woods where shade became blued and distances misty. He walked in a random search pattern, looking for something not yet clear to him. He felt it to be hidden in a crack behind peeling bark and stopped at intervals to examine trunks when configuration touched a chord of familiarity. The oddness of feeling this way about a forest he had scarcely bothered to penetrate before today lay as a cloudy and fading figment in his mind.

Something he loved drew him forward, a mission that held within its vague purpose some sacred

duty, although he was also dimly aware of rebellious negation from somewhere not yet quite smothered under that portion of his mind which had seized control.

Jake hunted for a specific tree. He now knew this much. He must find *them*. He could not replace the pronoun with an identity more definite. Now! There was the tree, a fir, heavy with shadow under drooping branches which swept almost to needle-carpeted floor.

He crawled under a canopy of boughs to the shade blackened trunk and, in the artificially created twilight, felt carefully from branch to branch. And then he found them, tiny balls, light as the fluff from a cottonwood tree. They absorbed light strangely, as if they had no substance—they were wisps of black cloud so light that his tactile senses proved too gross to register any weight or solidity. Yet they rolled on to his palm, behaving as so many minute marbles might have. He could pick one up between thumb and finger but he could not feel it.

He looked at them, spherical spiderwebs of substance, changing color to blend with the hues of his palm. And for a moment that silent, walled-in corner of his mind seemed to expand and prompted a thought.

*I'd better kill them.*

And immediately he felt almost physically choked.

Following that came a great love for the ephemeral things—it flooded his mind. He adored them, precious little cells of embryo life.

*No!* sounded deep under this wave of emotion.

*Yes!* came another sharp whisper, still recognizable as separate from his Earth self.

There was a stirring, a struggle somewhere in the far corners of his mind, a pale mental image trying to force itself outward, a flimsy figment of his personality that insisted that these tiny balls would be so easy to mash.

And silent thunder answered again, *No!*

*They are alien—they should be destroyed.*

But the mind-sound of these words came faintly and full of uncertainty and an immediate negation covered them with harsh syllables.

Jake suddenly knew his duty. This was his planet, the world he had been seeking, his new home. These filmy balls were his fellow travelers from a universe where mammalian dwellings were dying. This new planet swarmed with fresh homes for his people, warm, blood-filled life easy to occupy. He must find a safe resting place for each of his brother travelers, even as he had now found one for himself.

*No!* cried that restricted corner of Jake's mind, *not himself—myself—not myself. . .*

But again strong thunder drowned the protest with: *Go out now where mammals of this planet walk. Place a tiny sphere upon the flesh of neck or cheek. . .*

Jake was automatically threading his way among the trees as these ideas formed.

Somehow, with a mind that was still neither entirely alien nor bereft of his old self, Jake Terrell began to think himself back into Earthly routines. *The dentist—that's where I'm going.*

Then he began to see some humor in trading one of his precious little bits of gossamer for a tooth filling. He chuckled.

*Good joke on an old college pal. I'll give him one of these. He'll give me a hunk of silver in my mouth—I'll give him a new kind of life. . .*

Somehow, too, Jake resisted pressure that crowded upon him every moment of the journey toward his dental appointment, an urge that caused his hand to reach out unconsciously toward every human being who came close to him, an aching desire to leave one of his treasured, almost invisible cells upon each neck. But the dentist was his best friend, his good old Billy Marbry. He could not let his friend down. Billy Marbry deserved to be the first convert to a new world.

JAKE strode into the office with the suppressed excitement of a ten-year-old weaving his way along the line entering a circus tent. His mind was brimful with love, worship for these tiny spheres of misty darkness cuddled so carefully in his jacket pocket.

One part of Jake's mind echoed with laughter.

A very small isolated segment wailed, *What am I doing?*

But that small cry weakened with each repetition and finally ceased.

Dim light and discreet decor of the office had never before seemed so appropriate to him. There was warmth here from the dark-shaded lamps. Huddling shadows heightened the mystery of his mission, made a richly ceremonial setting for the gift of a seed to his friend. Jake could think of nothing but the treasure about to be transferred from the diaphanous group in his pocket.

The receptionist said, "Doctor Marbry will see you now, Mister Terrell."

Jake's laugh was the sudden short sound of a triumphantly happy being. He fumbled in his jacket as he walked toward the inner door, picked out one ethereal spore and strode into brightness of sterile surfaces.

Billy Marbry met Jake at the door, chart in hand.

"Let's see, you're mainly after a cleaning today, eh, Jake?"

Jake laughed, again, the sound almost a whinny. "A real clean-

ing. The start of a clean sweep of the whole world."

The dentist looked up sharply. "Drinking this early in the day, old buddy?"

"No. Just standing on the threshhold of destiny." Jake chuckled again. "Want to join me, old pal?"

He lifted a pinpoint of gossamer from his pocket.

Just a handclasp—or a brotherly paw on the dentist's shoulder—just as easy as that to begin a new order on Earth. Jake felt the cell squirm as the warmth of his hand enclosed it. That did it—hand on shoulder, a touch on his good old buddy's neck as he laughed.

"Be a good guy and leave me enough teeth to chew my soup at least."

Jake withdrew his hand and followed the dentist into his torture chamber. Secretly Jake was still laughing and watching Bill Marbry closely for some sign that the cell had reached the man's brain. Smugly he sat in the big chair and fitted his head back against the padded neck rest. His eyes remained fixed in a cold stare of alien intensity on the doctor.

Marbry muttered, "Is something the matter? You feel well?"

Jake said, "Sure. Why?"

He scanned the doctor's face intently.

"Your eyes," said the dentist. "I was once in a party that treed a cougar and I'll swear the look in that big cat's eyes was exactly like yours was a second ago. I felt like running for cover."

Both men laughed.

Jake said, "Maybe the cougar thought you were going to stick a drill in its mouth."

They laughed again.

"Hurry along with any excavating you need to do before I get scared enough to eat you up," Jake said. Again both laughed. But Jake's eyes watched, aware that for a second the infinitesimal imprisoned section of his mind tried to scream.

He settled back in the chair and meekly allowed the nurse's white hands to fasten a napkin around his neck. He held rigidly still while Marbry probed and clicked various instruments against enamel. And constantly he watched, waiting for first signs of that sudden struggle he knew would begin inside the doctor's skull within the next thirty minutes.

Marbry withdrew the probe after one last nerve-wrenching dig.

"You've got a cavity and it's going to go pretty deep," he told Jake. "You'll need some novocaine."

"That's fine with me, Doc."

Jake chuckled, feeling with that keen, expanding new mind of his a joyous kinship with this mammal that would soon awaken to the mastery of a blood brother. He sat chuckling softly to himself

*(Please turn to page 153 )*

BASIL WELLS



# ALL BROTHERS ARE MEN

*. . .but men are not necessarily brothers*

THE small coasting shull that Antor Ref had chosen for his northward journey along the Inland Passage of Slor's East Coast, was picking its way through a colorful plethora of similar stubby-masted craft, tiny kupps, oared or lateen-rigged, and wallowing huge cargo drogs. The forty-mile width of Nap Bay shone white with the chalky paleness of rocky bottom and circling headlands.

A large-winged craft, issuing an annoying buzzing roar, circled unevenly above the approaching lesser docks. Antor ignored it. The Words of Malan had declared that men do not fly. The truth was there for all to read. Aliens from Erth and unbelieving deviants might think they could emulate the birds. But they were deceived. Such delusions were harmful and unnatural. Only the Words had truth.

Waiting at the docking place was the rotund furry bulk of Hwat Ten. Hwat was wearing a scarlet-barred forest cloak to his knees and his pinkish-yellow body fur was groomed and shining. His vertically slitted, red-brown eyes shone with welcome.

Antor Ref sprang over the rail to the great flat stones of bluish fedrock, his arms outstretched. Their hands grasped the bushy hair tufts above two sets of earcups and tugged joyfully until the tears started.

Tears and laughter.

"You've grown fat, brother," Antor said.

"And you leaner and more wrinkled of belly and neck," cried out Hwat Ten.

Both guffawed. They gave each other an affectionate second hair-loosening tug. Tears streaming afresh, they bared their broad short-stubbed teeth in happy grins and broke apart. Antor's crimson eyes looked into Hwat's duller brownish eyes and his silvery furred arm linked with the shorter man's pinkly furred one.

"Five long years, brother," Hwat said, "since we trained together in Hri."

Antor looked around the dock and back at the docking shull. Now that the excitement of greeting Hwat was lessening his caution returned. Apparently no one was paying them any heed. The screaming of charcoal-winged offal birds wheeling overhead and the slap-slap of chop against the barnacled piers covered their words. "Five long, lonely years," agreed Antor, straightening his thin bony body to its full four feet. "Although I have been fortunate in acquiring several hundred followers—in limited cells of twenty of course—these Slorish eaters of filth are not to my taste as true fellows."

He thought that Hwat's eyes chilled as he spoke.

"Do not the Words of Malan say to hail all men as Fellows?"

Hwat murmured. "Are not all men to be brothers?"

"Of course—of course. You know I believe all that. It is simply that the old friends, the early memories, are closer."

"I, too," Hwat confessed, "in the early days of exile here, felt hostility. Most of these Slorish are happy and prosperous. It was difficult to bring them to understand that discipline and austerity and sacrifice are so important.

"But now all is well. I have found many sincere and loyal fellows. I have married a wonderful woman of the city."

"You, a Fellow of the Words—" choked out Antor.

"You forget that both of us, Antor, despite our common brother, Tanab Gon, are burdened with the bodies of Slorish natives."

"I have not forgotten that, whatever my present exterior," said Antor Ref coldly, "I am a Hri. In my exile I have acquired two female slaves, both black-furred Hris."

"And they know you only as a scant-furred Slorish *gorb*, a maggot—a crawler in filth—and their master."

An angry pulse beat in Antor's short, thick neck. But he kept his silence. Already he could see that Hwat Ten was corrupted. His tolerance of the thin-blooded Slorish way of life—even to his mating with one of them—revealed how far he had deviated.

"I have done well for the Fellows of Malan," he said, breaking the ugly little silence. "My cover of coasting shulls and heavy land freighting has expanded. Eighty shulls and fifty outfits of twenty beasts to each six-wheeled *yenn* pour a mounting flood of treasure into our Order."

"I, too," said Hwat Ten. "From the small weekly printing my funds acquired I have expanded. We print a hundred books and two daily news records, here and in Jalip, opposite the Erthport island of Zurn. We supply thousands of pamphlets and small booklets lauding the life of austerity, sacrifice of animal joy and devoted adherence to the Words of Malan. And we send much treasure to the Fellows in Hri."

Antor allowed himself a noiseless inward snort. From the well-padded appearance, the expensive scarlet-barred cloak of green and the glossy porskin sandals on Hwat's four-toed feet, not all the treasure was sent to Hri.

Of course a certain amount of reserve against sudden emergencies was essential. The Fellows of Malan, two thousand miles to the south, had no conception of the exigencies of trade. A third, occasionally a fourth, of the profits, was safely put aside. A comfortable feeling it gave to a dedicated man like himself.

When the Order once again regained ascendancy in the councils of the alienated continents of Slor,

Keth, Rinf and Foll, he would be in a position to further their ambitions. Then the Fellows would appreciate his wisdom in secretly retaining this contingency fund.

Hwat Ten brushed at his sleek fur impatiently.

"We'll get along to my home," he said, "as soon as your luggage comes off the shull. We have several years to catch up."

A burly old seaman with mangy patches of whitish bare flesh marring his pale brown fur came off the shull, carrying two faded black sacks with corded straps for handles. He dropped them wordlessly at Antor's feet and went back aboard.

"Why do you suppose Tanab Gon has summoned us to this meeting?" he said to Hwat as each of them shouldered a bag.

Hwat shook his tufted pinkish head.

"When we board the boat tomorrow," he said, "at the harbor east of the Erthport enclave, we will soon learn."

NOW that Antor Ref had eaten and was safely installed in his sleeping quarters Hwat could give some thought to his own possible future. He knew that a major crisis impended.

The reunion with his almost-brother, Antor, had been a disaster. Five years ago the Fellows of Malan had given twenty brain-stripped prisoners the complete memories of some of their most trusted and dedicated members. Both Antor and himself were, in everything but body, duplicates of the middle-aged historian Tanab Gon. A carefully edited resume of their bodies' former histories had been supplied and they had been allowed to "escape" to their native continents.

Antor had treated Hwat's beloved Lilse with a boorishness Hwat found inexcusable. He had ignored giving the slightest polite tug at Lilse's lovely twin tufts of sun-glowing yellow hair and his bow of acknowledgment had been a fractional inclination of his silvery beaky head.

They had not talked long after the evening meal. Hwat's barely repressed rage had dried up his flow of words and the tall bony man from distant Itar, in South Slor, had soon fallen silent. The five years had come between them. Neither of them was what he once had been. Hwat knew that he was not.

Both had changed—Antor Ref to the extremes of racial and nationalistic intolerance to which many Fellows of Malan, regrettably, were addicted. Hwat, too, was different. He still believed in the basics of the Words of Malan: moderation in all things, a measure of austerity and discipline and wisdom and that all men are of one flesh despite their outward appearance. He had grown toler-

ant according to the Words of Malan, yet the Fellows of Malan would damn him as deviant.

"I do not care much for your guest," Lilse said softly into his ear.

Hwat bounded up convulsively, his pulse surging hard.

"You startled me," he confessed.

Lilse smoothed his bushy fur and her soft hands toyed with the cuplike ears beneath them.

"You have never mentioned him to me," she said. "Where did you meet him? And why is he here?"

Hwat had, of course, revealed nothing of his double identity to his marriage partner. He was, to her, simply a Slorish citizen with a secret belief in the Words of Malan. Despite the banning of such study groups since the ejection of the Fellows ten years before, there were many secret students of Malan's century-old philosophy.

"We were captives together," Hwat explained. "The Hri pirates enslaved us. Aboard ship fortunately. Antor Ref was a good comrade then. He has soured. But we escaped together—and with us took a good amount of pirate loot."

"You have never told me before how you gained your wealth," said Lilse, pouting as she curled the soft three feet of her rounded gold-furred body into his lap. "You must tell me the whole story."

"Later when we have hours," Hwat said, stroking her back and breasts gently. "Tonight I must go to the sleeping platform at once. We leave early in the morning for Zurn."

"I would love to go with you," Lilse said wistfully. "I would like to see the strange palaces and the giant Erthmen and their machines. But I know the customs of Slor forbid it."

"I will bring you some of the printed fotocolor cards the Erthmen trade to us," Hwat promised. "If I owned one of the cameras they are teaching us to make you could see what I see there."

"What are you to do there, my Hwat?"

"Business of some sort. Antor Ref has scores of trading shulls and freighting lines. Expansion of his business I presume. He gave me for reference—and I was glad to oblige an old comrade."

"I do not like him," Lilse said fiercely. "I wish he had never come. I wish you would send him away. I hope you get sick and cannot go with him."

Hwat laughed, baring his broad short teeth as widely as he assumed a proper laugh required. It was rather an empty laugh. He, too, wished he could avoid going to meet his brother and Fellow, Tanab Gon, tomorrow. He had found a good life here in Nap.

"One does not brush off old friends so easily," he said. "He

must be exhausted from the voyage up here. Irritable and sick. Tomorrow he may be more like the Antor Ref I recall."

"I hate him," Lilse declared stoutly, scarlet eyes flashing.

"You judge too soon," admonished Hwat. "Wait and see."

But Hwat Ten was considering what was to befall with daylight. He determined to take a flat-holstered gas pistol, a double-barreled over-and-under weapon that fitted smoothly under his triple-layered body tunic and into the middle hollow of his chest. He would wear the usual dress dagger but he would exchange the two-foot sliver of inferior brittle gray metal for a tempered, gray-stained blade.

He had not dueled or fired a weapon, either for sport or in anger for three years—not since his marriage to Lilse—but he had not forgotten all his old skills.

Yet he would be slow. Better to avoid combat if at all possible—but to be ready.

TANAB GON came up out of the submersible's hatch into the stoutly compartmented hollow of the anchored cargo drog. The Fellows of Malan were not averse to the use of electrically—or otherwise—powered craft. In fact, before the coming of the accursed giant men from Erth they had possessed a monopoly over the control of such awesome powers.

But they had always been discreet. Hidden power is always more effective than the visible. The unknown surpasses the known. And so the Fellows lodged their sleek swift submersibles within altered cargo drogs or inside caverns with underwater entrances. Their weaponry and their other complex hardware they camouflaged.

With Tanab Gon came a shaggy black-furred native of Hri, mightily muscled and loyal to the death but with no great fire of reason in his gold-flecked green eyes. Orch was Tanab Gon's bodyguard. Orch was adept in the use of the sharpened twin daggers slung on his hips. His fists were clubs. His fingers were like strangler's cords. His knees could snap a spine or a leg.

"Seal the hatch," Tanab Gon ordered Orch, "and give me the locking widge."

Tanab and Orch were alone aboard the six-man craft. If this secret mission proved successful he would need the extra space for the transport of urgently needed treasure and the recruits.

Tanab pouched the widge and led the way to the upper deck, overlooking the hundred square miles of Zurn Bay's restless chop of waves. Off to the west the squat towers and expanding landing aprons of Erthport were visible. Even as he watched, a cargo ship thundered upward on fiery legs of atomic blast.

He had timed it to the second.

The two voluntary expatriates, his duplicated egos in these frailer, thin-furred Slorish outer husks, were ascending the wallowing ship's ladder.

"Brother," he said. And again: "Brother,"

The tugging of the tufts above each pair of ears came next, his own coarse black hair receiving a double buffeting. Then the Fellows' touch of the elbows.

"Come to the cabin prepared for us," said Tanab. "I have smoked terge flesh and roasted paddu roots ready for us there. And fermented terge milk, frozen and again awakened."

"It will be like home again," Hwat said, rather weakly and Antor Ref nodded, unsmiling.

Orch stood aside, his sly green eyes intent. He might know on the surface of his mind that these were trusted allies of his assigned master. But they were Slorish. Puny eaters of offal and cowards by name and nature. All Hri knew this. The chunky bodyguard regarded with suspicion even the men of the drog, all trusted men, many of them associate Fellows.

Seated at last—hard Hri stools grouped about the plain smooth-scoured planks of the table—Tanab Gon chewed a bit of blackened, smoke-reeking flesh and came directly to the business at hand.

"Our control of the noble houses of Hri," he said, "has been badly crippled. The men of Erth have brought flowing black fuel from beneath the ground to warm us. They trade for our gems and the peculiar white metal they desire machines and sealed plastic or bonded earth living shelters.

"Our people have grown soft and luxury loving. The Words of Malan are passed over or forgotten. Even as our enclaves in the four continents were taken from us—so it may soon be in our native land."

"It is so," said Antor Ref gloomily. "The Words of Malan are meaningless to the well fed and the prosperous. Only to the hungry and the miserable do they bring blessed comfort."

"We must find new ways to teach the wisdom of Malan," Hwat said eagerly. "We three have the same mind. We are brothers and well versed in the Words. We have experience in three ways of life. Was this why you brought us together, brother?"

Tanab Gon eyed his guests. What sickly ill-formed men were these Slorish. Hard to remember that they were both himself—or had been five years before. Then they had owned identical memories and attitudes.

Now, as the increasingly faulty intelligence of the Fellows reported, Hwat Ten was rapidly becoming a deviationist. He must be forced to return to proper ways. And Antor Ref was reputed to conform to the Words outwardly

but to be siphoning away the wealth of the Order. For Antor there would be a severe reckoning should this prove true.

All men changed, he reflected. He was not the simple zealot he had been years past. Then he had served the bumble-headed leaders of the Order with unswerving loyalty. Now he knew them for the bunglers and bumblers they were. Disregard his brilliant solution for their basic troubles, would they?

With him leading the Fellows of Malan and with the aid of lesser men—Fellows like these two, his submerged twin selves—the ascendancy of the Order over all the ten continents of Okar might be restored.

"We have a task that can rid us forever of our greatest foe," said Tanab Gon. "The Ancients of our Order refused to listen to me. But for the good of the Order we must act. We are of one mine, we three. And Orch will obey without question.

"A fact accomplished, brothers. They will accept success. We will have honor and respect—be given leadership."

He saw that the faces of the two thinly furred men were drawn and suspicious, the thin, corded face and the fat, normally smiling face.

"What is this disapproved venture?" asked Antor Ref.

"The destruction of Erthport and the entire island of Zurn," Tanab said. He looked toward the door, guarded by the coarse-furred Hri. "The cowardly giants flew armed conflict and war. They will never dare set up a new free port."

"Not so," Hwat cried out, scowling. "Many more great spacecraft would come to retaliate."

"They are but illusionists," Antor Ref scoffed. "They do not really fly or traverse in emptiness. They are masters of charlatanry and mass hypnotism. But to destroy them would bring death to those of us involved."

"You are wrong about the Erthmen," Tanab said. "We know they come from offplanet. We know that the heavens are not of brassy ether with niches and paths. The Words of Malan came in riddles that only true scholars finally solved."

Antor Ref's crimson eyes blazed. He rose to his feet.

"The Words say clearly that man is never to fly."

"By his own power," Tanab explained shortly. "We captured an Erth giant whose wing crashed into one of our mountains. The mind strip told the story. And we sent the memories of Resl Mer back to Erthport with his body."

"They have deceived you," Antor said bitterly. "You are as much a deviationist as is Hwat. Yes, and worse. I will not listen to any more lies against the Words."

"I agree with Antor Ref," Hwat Ten said stiffly. "Not for the rea-

sons he gives. Your words are reasonable. I can see that the Erthmen fly. I have flown with a friend—a Slorish merchant. But I will not help you to blow up this island and Erthport because much greater woes would come upon all our peoples. You must forget this mad dream. Learn to live with Erthmen and learn how to teach the Words of Malan without coercion and subversion."

The two Slorishmen turned away from Tanab. They headed toward the cabin door. Orch stood there stiffly, his eyes hot and wary, his strong fingers gripping his cloak-hidden daggers.

"Do not allow them to pass, Orch," Tanab said crisply.

UNDER his cloak Hwat Ten had his fingers well into the grips of his holstered weapon.

"Consider," Tanab Gon was pleading, "the quick solution of all our miseries. I have acquired four thermonuclear devices through the knowledge of the captured Erth flyer. We shall plant them at appropriate spots with a timing device that will permit us to be miles away, aboard the submersible when the destruction occurs. Forget our ideological differences. We are one. We are more truly brothers than any born of woman."

"Out of my way," Antor Ref warned the black-furred man. In his hand was a stub-barreled gun.

"I, too, am armed," Tanab Gon


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announced. Turning slightly, Hwat saw that the dark-furred Fellow cradled a four-barreled gas-powered weapon in his arms.

"Let us talk further," Tanab pleaded.

Hwat thought of lovely Lilse and the pleasant life he had come to appreciate in the city of Nap. After the harsher climate and planned austerities of barren Hri the life he had known in Slor was close to ideal. His mind had expanded and he had glimpsed a small part of what man's potential could be.

The mad plot to destroy Zurn and the Erthmen must be foiled. His own fate as an undercover Fellow was upon him. The Fellows must destroy him. Action seemed the only out.

He fired through the cloak, saw Tanab reel, raise the four-barreled weapon again. Antor's short weapon roared. Orch screamed in wild rage and Hwat fired again, more accurately this time.

Tanab slewed around and collapsed.

Antor Ref's body thudded soddenly back against Hwat's knees. Hwat caught a glimpse of a knife slash and of Antor's head askew above the red gape. Then his weapon was out, its two-foot length warding the two daggers of Orch.

Orch was a dead man. His chest was torn open from the blast of Antor's pistol. Yet he fought on ferociously.

The years of eating and enjoying the good life while his skill with weapons and in combat were mothballed were catching up with Hwat Ten. He fought strongly but clumsily.

The keen-ground dagger of Orch came through and he was aware of gushing and of weakness. But there was little pain. Only a sense of darkening twilight. He saw Orch fall.

The wisdom of the Words of Malan, came his final thought, was not for men. Not even himself. ●

## SF CALENDAR

*(Continued from page 91)*

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*August* 14-16, 1970. AGACON 70. Memberships: Supporting, $1.50; Attending $2.50. For information: AGACON 70, Box 10885, Atlanta, Georgia 30310.

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*August* 21-23, 1970. TORONTO FAN FAIR. At the King Edward Sheraton Hotel, Toronto, Canada. Guests-of-Honor: Anne McCarffrey, Isaac Asimov. Membership: $2.00 in advance. For information: Peter Gill, 18 Glen Manor Drive, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

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*August* 21-24, 1970. 28th WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION: HELICON INTERNATIONAL. In Heidelberg, West Germany. For information and registration: HEICON 70, 6272 Niedernhausen, West Germany.

*(Continued from page 29)*

turned to Maggie. "I'm pleased that a Tingle-lime commercial was on when you made your first purchase because it demonstrates the superiority of the Telemart Three over all other models. Believe it or not, a carbonated drink is not an easy object to transmit. With older systems there was an appreciable loss of carbon dioxide pressure before the container was completely formed. But the Telemart Three comes so close to instantaneous construction of the transmitted object that—"

"Oh, look," Maggie interupted. "There's a commercial for liqueur chocolates. It's ages since I've had a liqueur chocolate."

Ted hurried into the ground-floor room where his wife had slept since her injury and found the bracelet of Venusian gold. He had a feeling he would need to get the best possible price for it.

IN SPITE of intensive and even a certain amount of abject pleading, he dropped over five thousand on the bracklet. He hurried to his favorite gymnasium and spent two hours trying to work the tension toxins out of his body but all the while a gloomy certainty that he had made a major blunder was building up in him. Finally, halfway through a set of deep knee bends, he made a decision—Maggie would have to give him her sacred vow not to use the Telemart for anything beyond normal household shopping. If necessary he would even sit with her at nights until satisfied she was going to play the game.

He showered quickly and drove home in his aging rotary-engined Pontiac. The tall narrow house was in darkness except for a dim, shifting light in the window of the lounge. Ted sprinted up the stone steps and ran into the house but he had trouble opening the lounge door. Something heavy seemed to be preventing it from moving. He got his head into the room and blinked incredulously at what he saw.

Maggie was sitting close to the proscenium, watching a noisy powerboat race. She was almost hidden from his view by a pile of cartons and boxes, most of which had been opened. In the first seconds he picked out three new table lamps, a gilt-framed painting that looked like a Renoir, several of the recently developed four-legged turkeys in polyethylene skins, a salon-type hair drier, numerous hatboxes and a deluxe Micropedia Britannica, complete with reclining chair and ceiling projector.

Ted was unable to suppress a plaintive whimpering sound as he forced his way into the room.

"You bitch," he moaned. "You faithless bitch."

"What did you say, honey?" Maggie twisted a knob on the

handset and the sound of the jockeying speedboats faded away. She wheeled her chair around to face Ted and he saw the Telemart brochure open on her knees.

"What do you think you're doing, Maggie? They don't give this stuff away, you know—our bank account is automatically debited every time you press that button."

Maggie shrugged.

"I've been enjoying myself—which makes a nice change. Ted, honey, you really should look at this brochure. You don't have to buy just what they show you in the commercials—Telemart offers all kinds of services I never heard—"

She stopped speaking as he picked up one of the turkeys and hurled it at the vista of boats beyond the proscenium arch. The bird passed through a red boat, hit the wall of the room and bounced back out onto the floor.

"I'm going to kill you," Ted announced. "I'm a fair-minded man and I don't like the idea of killing you—but you give me no choice."

"You've been drinking."

"I'm cold sober."

He looked around the room, selected one of the new table lamps and removed its ornate shade, leaving himself with a serviceable blunt instrument.

Maggie clutched the Telemart's handset to her bosom in a strangely protective gesture.

"Don't come near me."

"In a way I blame myself," Ted said sadly, hefting the base of the lamp. "I should have known you weren't ready for the responsibilities of marriage."

He stepped over a cluster of perfume bottles and swung down at Maggie's head. She twisted away from the lamp. It crunched into the back of the wheelchair, tipping it over. Maggie sprawled among the hatboxes. Breathing heavily, Ted stood over her and raised the base with both hands, noting with one part of his mind that she was still holding the handset and was, in fact, twisting a red knob on it. Poor mindless lump, he thought as he brought down the club.

"Drop it right there, fellow," a voice said close behind him. Ted spun and saw a hard-faced young man in a gray suit stepping down from the truncated catwalk attached to the proscenium. The stranger was holding an automatic pistol.

"Who—" Ted's voice faltered as he tried to grasp the enormity of what was happening. "What is this?"

The stranger smiled unpleasantly. "You can't have studied the section of the Telemart brochure covering our new Three-star Protection Service for clients' lives and property."

"Protection?"

"Yes. As soon as we get an

emergency signal a trained security man who is on duty at the station is instantaneously transmitted into the home and in this case I'd say I made it just in time."

"But they can't do that." Ted had an overpowering sense of outrage. "After a while there'd be hundreds of duplicates of you running about the city. Telemart can't go around creating extra people we're overpopulated as it is."

A shadow crossed the stranger's face. "That's taken care of. They deliberately program a flaw into the hiemoglobin structure of any duplicates they have to transmit. A massive embolism will kill me in a few hours. It's a hell of a prospect." The stranger raised his right hand and leveled the pistol.

"Just a minute," Ted said desperately. "There must be some arrangement we can come to. I've got money "

The stranger regarded him out of cold, tortured eyes.

"What good is money to a duplicate like me? I've got a short life and all I can do is make it as satisfying as possible."

He aimed the pistol right between Ted's eyes and pulled the trigger. ●

Daniels turned and went up the snowy path to the house. He'd like some coffee and a bite to eat—but first he had to do the chores. He had to milk the cows and feed the pigs. The chickens must wait till morning—it was too late to feed the chickens. The cows would be waiting at the barn door. They had waited for a long time and it was not right to make them wait.

He opened the door and stepped into the kitchen.

Someone was waiting for him. It sat on the table or floated so close above it that it seemed to be sitting. The fire in the stove had gone out and the room was dark but the creature sparkled.

*You saw?* the creature asked.

"Yes," said Daniels. "I saw and heard. I don't know what to do. What is right or wrong? Who knows what's right or wrong?"

*Not you,* the creature said. *Not I. I can only wait. I can only keep the faith.*

Perhaps among the stars, thought Daniels, might be those who did know. Perhaps by listening to the stars, perhaps by trying to break in on their conversations and by asking questions, he might get an answer. Certainly there must be some universal ethics. A list, perhaps, of Universal Commandments. Maybe not ten of them. Maybe only two or three—but any number might be enough.

"I can't stay and talk," he said. "I have animals to take care of. Could you stick around? Later we can talk."

He fumbled for the lantern on the bench against the wall, found the matches on the shelf. He lit the lantern and its feeble flame made a puddle of light in the darkness of the room.

*You have others to take care of?* asked the creature. *Others not quite like yourself. Others, trusting you, without your intelligence?*

"I guess you could say it that way," Daniels said. "I've never heard it put quite that way before."

*Could I go along with you?* the creature asked. *It occurs to me, just now, that in many ways we are very much alike.*

"Very much—" But with the sentence hanging in the air, Daniels stopped.

Not a hound, he told himself. Not the faithful dog. But the shepherd. Could that be it? Not the master but the long-lost lamb?

He reached out a hand toward the creature in a swift gesture of understanding, then pulled it back, remembering it was nothing he could touch.

He lifted the lantern and turned toward the door.

"Come along," he said.

Together the two of them went through the storm toward the barn and the waiting cows. ●



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(Continued from page 138)

as Billy prepared a hypodermic, thinking how there would be two of them now to divide the precious gossamer spores and go out among two-legged animals, bending them unknowingly to the creation of a new world for his people. And again in some corner of Jake's skull Jake sensed a weak crying.

He watched the dentist point the needle toward him, felt a slight prick at the joint of jawbone. He settled back to await the onslaught of numbness around his gums—then suddenly began screaming and he knew that he was dying.

No—the thing inside his skull was screaming. It was dying—not himself.

JAKE knew his mouth was open but no sound vibrated his throat membranes. He sensed the dentist's sharp look, his fast reaction, heard the exclamation as the man whirled.

"Damn it, why didn't you tell me you were allergic to novocaine?"

Jake tried to talk: "No—not allergic. It's the thing. It's the thing in my head. It's not a novocaine reaction. You've killed the thing—don't!" he shouted as he saw Marbry turning back toward him with another hypo.

He knocked the dentist's arm aside and jumped from the chair. That portion of mind he recognized as himself was emerging, gaining strength. His words became recognizable.

He shouted again, "You've killed the thing that was inside my head. Novocaine will poison it. You've killed it."

He saw the dentist recoil, saw the nurse back up against the door. She slipped out of the room.

Marbry shouted, "Sit down a minute. Let me counteract that novocaine—"

Jake dodged behind the chair, repeating, "No. I need the novocaine. It's poisoned the thing in my head. I'm free, Billy." He began pleading with the doctor. "You've got one in your head. Take a shot of novocaine before it grows strong enough to grab control of you. Novocaine will kill it."

Marbry backed into the outer office.

Jake followed, begging, "Take the novocaine, Bill. Quick! Before it drives you out of your mind—before you can't think for yourself any more."

The nurse turned from the phone, calling, "They're coming."

Marbry held both hands up toward Jake.

"Try to relax, fellow. You'll be all right. You're just a little out of your head. Everything will be all right."

He edged along the office wall.

Jake followed him still peading, "Take the novocaine, Bill, before it's too late. Save the world—"

"He's crazy!" the nurse screamed.

Marbry pleaded, "Just relax, Jake. We won't harm you. We want to help you. I'm your friend. Remember?"

Jaked pushed a hand into his pocket and felt for the tiny cloud-like balls.

"See, Bill? It's these things. They're after us. I put one in your head. Kill it quick." He began picking the alien things from his pocket, dropping them under his heel to crush them. They were moving wildly and he ran fingers around in the wrinkled fabric after the last ones. "Now get the one in your head," he begged the dentist. "Take the novocaine. Poison it."

He saw the horrified look of the dentist and realized his friend could not see the spores in the dim office light. He held up the last one, trying to show it.

"Look, Bill. I'm not crazy. We've got to kill them all or it will be the end of the human race. We'll be slaves, zombies for these things."

Marbry continued to repeat, "Just relax. We'll have help for you in a minute."

Jake did not see the uniformed figures come into the room. He felt strong hands on his shoulders. His arms were pulled back. Cuffs snapped around his wrists.

A rough voice said, "Here now, buddy—everything's going to be all right."

Jake was dragged down the hall, pleading and shouting back to the dentist, "Take the novocain before you wreck the world."

In the squad car he begged to be taken back, to be listened to, to be taken to someone with understanding, until the prick of another needle and subsequent narcotic sleep stilled his tongue. •


next month's

GALAXY

features

BRADBURY

next month's

IF

features

ASIMOV

the best of all possible worlds

*(Continued from page 2)*

*variations of up to 70% within a span of a couple of years. IQ, which is a measure of the ability to learn, has nothing to do with financial success or the ability to apply that knowledge. That is the province of creativity and just plain drive. Any comparison among those qualities is specious. I can't understand the furor over something which can't be defined very well, and doesn't have much impact in our lives.*

*I disagree with you on the failures of the Caucasoids. The prime purpose of any species is to survive. If anything, we have done too well. Most of our problems are due to the over abundance of our abilities at this. We have got problems; but, until the Caucasoid population is in a decline, I can't really feel that we have failed. I certainly don't like what we have been doing to ourselves, whatever the color, and we have a long way to go. However, I am optimistic about our chances of getting there.*

*Robert Ewart*
*Bedford Hills, N.Y.*

On a purely population basis, Bob, I don't think the Caucasoids are even in the race—we're vastly outnumbered, though we're ahead on acquisitiveness and muscle. And at least a sidelight on survival may be suggested by a recent *Wall Street Journal* report that college graduates over six feet two inches tall receive an average starting salary 12.4 per cent higher than those under six feet. I don't know exactly what this means—but if simple survival is the measure of success we might all do best to walk tall. And pick on the small.

Regardless of race, creed or color. I know you don't mean to and neither do I. Thanks for a great letter.

Included here is a mere sampling of letters to give some idea of the range of interest. The subject will be covered more completely in a future editorial.

*Dear Mr. Jakobsson:*

*Things are looking up. There was much consternation here for a while at the new state of* Galaxy *and* If, *missing issues and such—um, by the way, I hear ugly rumors from my subscribing friends about missing issues—you'll probably hear them pretty soon. But it's such a relief to be able to enjoy an editorial for a change—two editorials, even. Campbell's get me so darn mad I usually have to chuck the magazine into a corner for a while to cool down—seldom that there's much worth reading there anyway. Alas, I can't comment on your latest contents, not having read them yet either—only the Budrys book review. Whatever else you do, keep him! And I'll add my voice calling for Delany. Please?*

*I see your publisher is on the side of the angels in The Great Staple War. I only hope his glue is permanent.*

*Being in the fortunate/unfortunate position of having to buy* Galaxy *and* If *(and* WOT*) as long as they survive, to maintain complete collections, she said modestly, I'm very glad to see that they aren't headed for the bottomless pits after all.*

*Best of luck,*

*Sue Anderson*
*East Lansing, Michigan*

I admire your choice of reading matter. You and I see eye to eye on Budrys—shall we call him peerless? With readers like you, how can *Galaxy/If* not survive? You take care.

*Dear Mr. Jakobsson:*

*My congratulations and thanks for your editorial whack at John Campbell in the November* Galaxy.

*I have in times past carried on an intermittent, but rather futile, duel with Mr. Campbell—futile because, you know, he has that magazine and I have my stationery.*

*So it is indeed a pleasure to see a rational discussion of one of his articles in print.*

*I have my own revolutionary idea about the (taken for granted) difference of blacks from whites. I note that black cultures have remained superior in tropical zones and postulate, therefore, that some yet unknown thermal variant compounded of temperature differences and the heat-absorption differential of dark skin has caused their brains to be addled outside of an area stretching from, say, Conakry to Lusaka.*

*This in no way, mind you, implies that blacks are inferior*—not within their proper sphere, *which evidently is what Mr. Campbell is driving at.*

*Seriously, though, it seems remarkable to me that an ingenious man, who is willing to criticize sociologists for being too narrow-minded to investigate the possibility that there is in fact a physical difference between races, should himself be so circumscribed that he will not take up the subject of discrimination.*

*Perhaps an application of Occam's Razor would help trim Mr. Campbell's ideas down to size.*

*Discrimination is so simple—and it fits so many facts so readily. Why spend so much time and mental energy in pursuit of some mysterious pseudo-scientific will-of-the-wisp?*

*I can only conclude that Mr. Campbell has some vested interest in finding a phlogiston to fit his needs. If I did not know what a forward-looking thinker he is, I would suggest that his interest is prejudice.*

*Again, my thanks. Your publication remains excellent.*

*Best wishes,*
*Thomas O. Gary*
*Troy, Mich*

Variations in human skin composition have been and are currently under scientific scrutiny and analysis, with particular attention to their effectiveness under different atmospheric and temperature conditions. The last time I looked, several months ago, conclusions were not yet definite and no cultural trends were either inferred or envisioned.

Thank you for a constructive letter. Differences, some obvious, some subtle, exist of course between individual Blacks as they do between individual Whites. And isn't that great?

Only the very dull see or have tolerance for uniformity.

*Dear Mr. Jakobsson:*

*I have oft been tempted to write a letter to the editor but your editorial in the December issue of* IF *was the first to force action. You obviously missed the point of Mr. Campbell's editorial completely. It was the concept that "difference" implies "higher" and "lower" which he was arguing against. The fact that you failed to grasp this*

*shows that you are among the victims of the prejudice which he was attempting to refute.*

*In trying to negate Mr. Campbell's thesis, you imply in every turn that he said the opposite of what he did say (and suggest that it is not necessary for anyone to check your sources.) You imply he holds "White 'Scholarly' standards" in high esteem, he clearly shows that they are invalid criteria; you imply he holds Scots to be superior in all respects to Blacks, he says he much prefers the music developed uniquely by the Blacks of Trinidad to that by his own people. But why go on? The point should be clear now. So fish your October issue of* Analog *out of the trash can and* read *what Mr. Campbell says instead of what you think he is going to say.*

*I'm enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and would like a personal reply.*

*By the way, I generally agree with your editorials, so keep up the good work.*

*I'm enclosing a check for a 12-issue subscription to IF.*

*Thank you.*

*James C. Fairfield*
*Wichita, Kan.*

I failed to grasp nothing in Mr. Campbell's editorial—not even the expressed innuendo that the scientific community had, by implication, condemned Blacks as intellectually inferior to Whites. I implied nothing about the White "Scholarly" standards (the quotations are Mr. Campbell's) but simply stated that, despite a Black heritage, Walter Francis White was outstandingly successful by those standards in a hostile White environment. As were, I might add here, authors Pushkin in Russia and Dumas in France.

Nor did I imply that Mr. Campbell considered Scots "superior in all respects"—I did point out that he reasoned from the particular to the general in this particular editorial in citing the success of a couple of Scots and then inferring greater adaptability to Scots in our society. Individual Black successes in our Caucasoid society abound in all areas from athletics through arts and sciences, education and government—successes won against harsher environmental conditions than most Whites encounter—enough of them certainly to disprove any dogmatic link between skin color and type and quality of intellect and/or talent.

From Booker T. Washington through Surgeon Daniel Hale Williams to the present Blacks have contributed a hell of a lot more than Trinidad rhythm to "Caucasoid" culture on its own terms and we stand as idiots if we remain blind to the fact.

More to come on this at a later date.

*Dear Sirs:*

*Congratulations! Several months ago I quit buying both* Galaxy *and* If *as I was convinced that I would never see anything but psuedo-sophistication and false respectability in either. I had heard that both had changed editors and publishers, but-being slightly strapped for cash at the time-I abstained for the time being.*

*Then I picked up the Dec. issue of* Worlds of If. *I was shocked! Quality at last! The artwork was free and unchained (although I would have preferred that the first paragraph of Nor-*

*man Spinrad's story not be* completely *covered) and in the ashes of the pyre a new* Worlds of If *arose. Young and powerful. A magazine I truly enjoyed reading. Spinrad's and Brunner's stories were the highlights of the magazine for me.*

*Artistically your magazine is terrific, although a word to the wise—don't over-work the master. Get another master and they can spell each other. Get Jim Steranko. I hope to see more of Spinrad in the future, along with Harlan Ellison, Philip Jose Farmer, Phil Dick and Larry Eisenberg. Glad to hear that you are reviving* Worlds of Tomorrow. *Glad because there is a chronic need for sf magazines—and I feel that it will be a good one with you characters backing it!*

*On parting I say: Good luck in the future, good luck now—and ditch the digest size by 1971.*

*David Lewton*
*Indianapolis, Ind.*

**This month's *If* First introduces Timothy M. Brown, a sophomore physics major at Wesleyan University, interested mainly in problems in astronomy —an interest triggered by an early conversion to science fiction. At 19 he's a veteran of eight years of pounding out sf, which he has only now begun to try to market.**

***Ethics of Trade*, you'll agree, is a fine story and augurs for a real discovery.**

**—JAKOBSSON**

*Editor:*

*Regarding Edward M. Osachie's letter in the November* Hue and Cry *—I must say that his complaint has been long overdue concerning Arthur Clarke's "disclaimer" on the copyright page of the tenth U.S. printing of* Childhood's End: "*The opinions expressed in this book are not those of the author.*"

*This remark of Clarke's is not a recent addition, but has been placed in all editions of* C.E. *since its first publication by Ballantine Books in 1953. One would think someone would remarked about it before now. In any case, the meaning of the statement came out when I spoke with Mr. Clarke early in 1969 while researching my also-overdue book about the gentleman and his works. He had been a bit evasive about answering the question in his letter, but he finally explained that he did not believe man could evolve according to his hopes without venturing into space. As most of your readers know, mankind does not get to travel into space in* C.E., *but is restrained from doing so by the Overlords. Ironically, the only man permitted to leave the planet Earth by the Overlords is also the only man left on Earth to die when humanity joins the Overmind.*

*Thus, Clarke apologized for not letting Man become Spaceman in* Childhood's End. 2001 *eventually made up for this in some respects. In closing, let me correct Mr. Osachie that* C.E. *is not the expanded version of* Against the Fall of Night. *The latter was rewritten under the title* The City and the Stars, *while* C.E. *is really a lengthening of a Clarkian novella,* Guardian Angel.

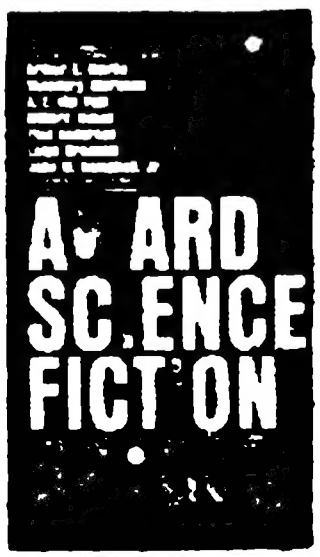
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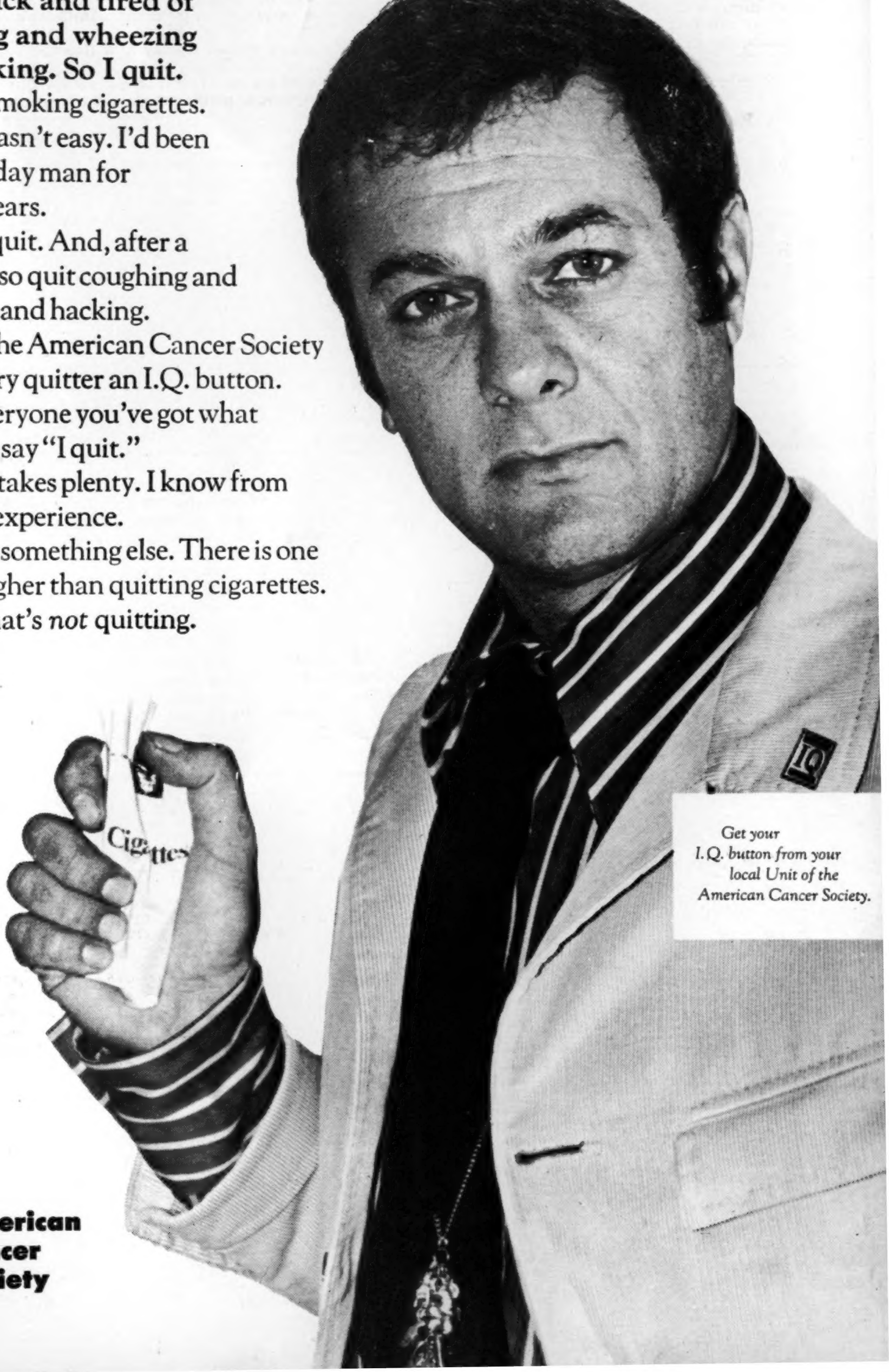
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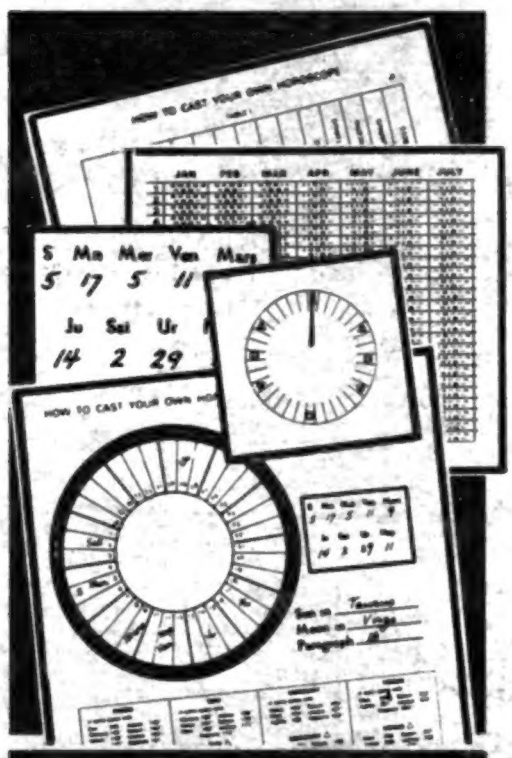
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